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# CONTENTS

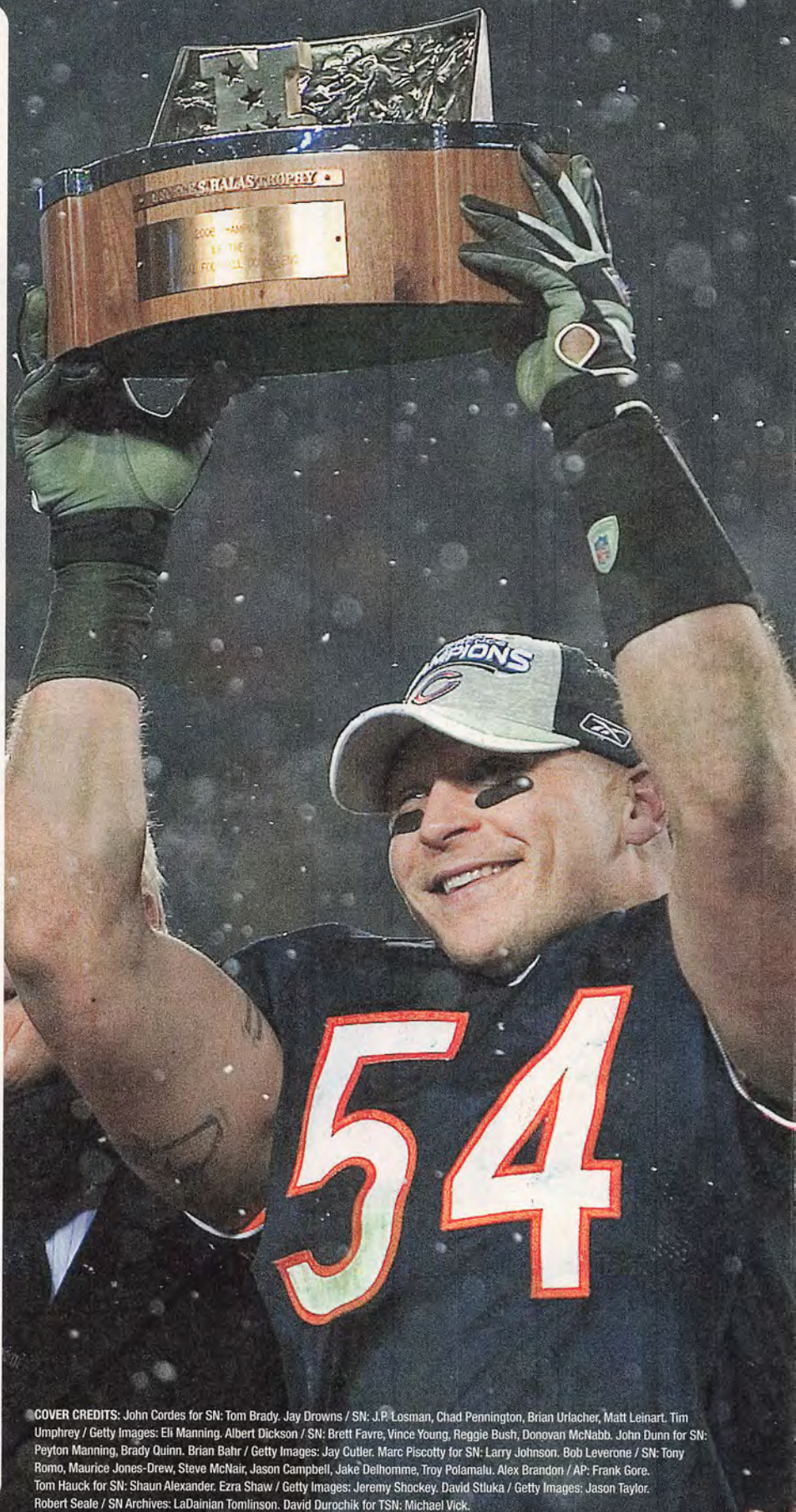
Scouting the NFL.....	4
Fantasy preview .....	14
AFC predictions .....	18
NFC predictions .....	136
2008 draft preview .....	252
2006 standings .....	254
2007 preseason schedule .....	254
2007 regular-season schedule .....	255

## AFC

Baltimore Ravens .....	20
Buffalo Bills .....	27
Cincinnati Bengals .....	34
Cleveland Browns.....	41
Denver Broncos.....	48
Houston Texans.....	56
Indianapolis Colts .....	63
Jacksonville Jaguars.....	70
Kansas City Chiefs.....	77
Miami Dolphins .....	84
New England Patriots .....	92
New York Jets.....	99
Oakland Raiders.....	106
Pittsburgh Steelers.....	114
San Diego Chargers .....	121
Tennessee Titans .....	128

## NFC

Arizona Cardinals.....	138
Atlanta Falcons .....	145
Carolina Panthers .....	152
Chicago Bears .....	159
Dallas Cowboys .....	166
Detroit Lions .....	174
Green Bay Packers .....	181
Minnesota Vikings .....	188
New Orleans Saints .....	195
New York Giants .....	202
Philadelphia Eagles .....	210
St. Louis Rams .....	217
San Francisco 49ers .....	224
Seattle Seahawks.....	231
Tampa Bay Buccaneers .....	238
Washington Redskins.....	245



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# Letter from the editor

In years gone by, we conducted surveys to find out what readers want in a preview magazine. But about a decade ago, we quit doing the the surveys. Year in, year out, the results were the same. Readers want one thing, even at the expense of everything else.

Team previews.

And since that time, we've had the biggest, most complete NFL team previews available anywhere. We did five pages per team while no other publisher did more than four.

OK, make sure you're sitting down. This is big.

You ready?

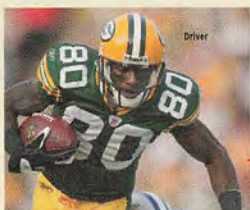
This year, we give you seven pages per team.

Seven. As in two more than last year. That's a 64-page bump overall. I don't know how we got the boss to greenlight this, but we did.

Yes, friends, life is good. Here's a glimpse of how good.



## SCOUTING REPORTS: OFFENSE



### Brett Favre, QB

**Strengths:** His great arm strength. Plays hurt and suffers no drop-off in production. Makes great yardage reads and excels at working through his progressions. Has a quick release and great pocket presence. Runs himself into the line with his back.

**Weaknesses:** Can be overconfident in his ability. Runs hot-and-cold. Forces some throws and puts the ball up for grabs. Can run a little but has lost some foot speed.

**Bottom line:** Favre isn't the player he was even two years ago, but he still has a strong arm and a gunnery mentality. The Packers might have assembled him with enough talent to make one more playoff run before he retires. **Grade: B**

### Vernand Moroney, RB

**Strengths:** Has terrific athleticism and speed. Displays great skills as a

### Receiver

**Weaknesses:** Needs to get stronger and be more willing to grind out yards inside. Must become a more patient runner. Not a great blocker.

**Bottom line:** Moroney has all the ability in the world but struggles mentally to grasp the NFL game and is only a backup-caliber player. **Grade: D**

### Strand Jackson, RB

**Strengths:** Athletic and sees the field well. Shows the patience to wait for blocks and make cuts. Has nice hands as a receiver and adjusts to off-target passes.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks the explosiveness to produce long touchdown runs. Must secure the ball better in traffic and improve his pass blocking. Has durability issues.

**Bottom line:** Jackson could become a punishing runner if he lowers his shoulders more frequently—and stops

## EXPERT ANALYSIS

Our correspondents provide unmatched analysis of every team, unit by unit.

## SCOUTING REPORTS

Our War Room scouts break down and grade the top offensive and defensive players on each team. It's hard-core football analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of more than 700 players.

## SCOUT TAKES

A scout from another team sizes up the Bengals. I think they'll be better this year. They are a dangerous team that can strike and put up points.

Carson Palmer has everything you want in a quarterback. He's smart, accurate and tough and has a rocket for an arm.

Justin Smith is a solid player, but I don't think he's in that elite class of defensive ends. He gives you the combination of pass-rush skill, but he's not a superior pass rusher and he's not a dominant run player.

Rudi Johnson is a banger. He runs for tough yards and breaks tackles. He doesn't have that home run ability, but the first guy rarely tackles him.

Jonathan Joseph, their first-round pick last year, certainly proved his worth. And they added some secondary depth in this year's draft.

Eric



## SCOUT TAKES

We talk to scouts around the league to get their views of the competition.

## INSIDERS POLL

Matt Schaub will:

a) Throw 20-plus TD passes and lead the Texans to their first winning record

b) Make steady progress and guide the Texans to six or seven wins

c) Take over where David Carr left off: take tons of sacks, produce five or fewer wins

Based on a poll of SN's 32 team correspondents

## INSIDERS POLLS

We utilize our stellar network of team correspondents to get the pulse of the league on a wide range of questions.

## FANTASY SOURCE PICKS



STUD

WR Bernard Berrian

STUMBLER

RB Cedric Benson

BIGGEST RISK/REWARD

QB Rex Grossman

DRAFT-DAY BARGAIN

TE Desmond Clark

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## SECRET WEAPONS

We spotlight a player who might not be a star (yet), but who will make a big difference in the team's performance.

## SECRET WEAPON



### BEN UTECHT, TE

He is the ideal fit in the Cowboys' two-tight end formation—a competent blocker and reliable misdirection receiver who consistently makes catches that move the chains. Utecht's ability to block from the end of the line allows the team to move starting TE Dallas Clark into the slot.

## BOLD PREDICTIONS

1 His physical problems behind him, Ben Roethlisberger will bounce back and have the kind of season he had in 2004 and '05.

2 The defense will miss LB Joey Porter, not so much because of his production but because of the intensity and attitude he brought to the defense.

3 The offensive line will struggle without C Jeff Hartings, who retired. Hartings covered for some of the shortcomings of

## BOLD PREDICTIONS

Words of wisdom you can take to the bank.

All this and more (depth charts, rosters, schedules, etc.) awaits just a few pages to your right. You've never had a football preview smorgasbord like this before.

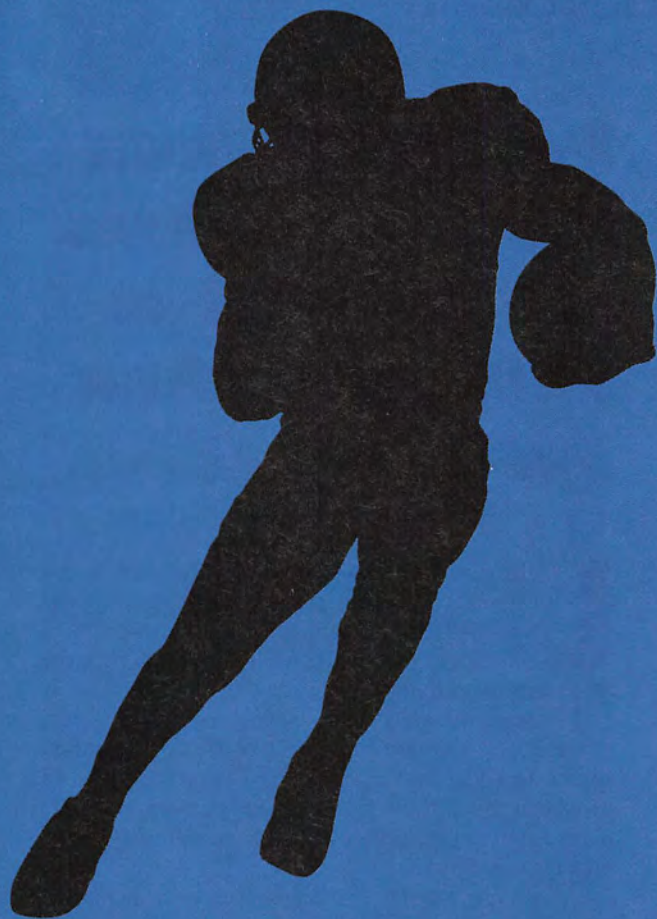
Bon appetit.

*Mike Nahrstedt*

Mike Nahrstedt

Senior Managing Editor

[mnahrstedt@sportingnews.com](mailto:mnahrstedt@sportingnews.com)



Get a feel for your team's draft strategy inside the  
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## If you think the Patriots' offseason approach was relentless, wait 'til you see them go after Super Bowl ring No. 4

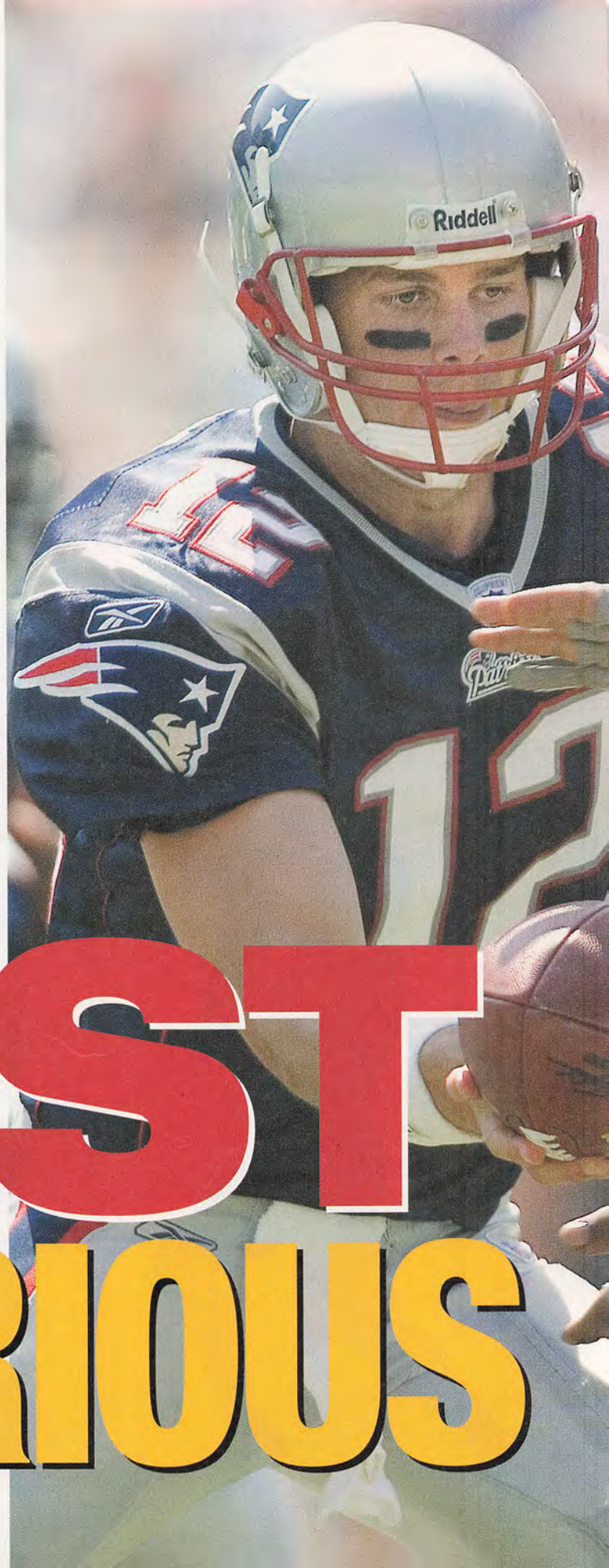
BY DENNIS DILLON

**L**et's admit it. We watched what the Patriots did this spring—the free-agent signings, the trades—and thought they were acting out of character. Sort of like Will Ferrell playing the heavy in a melodrama.

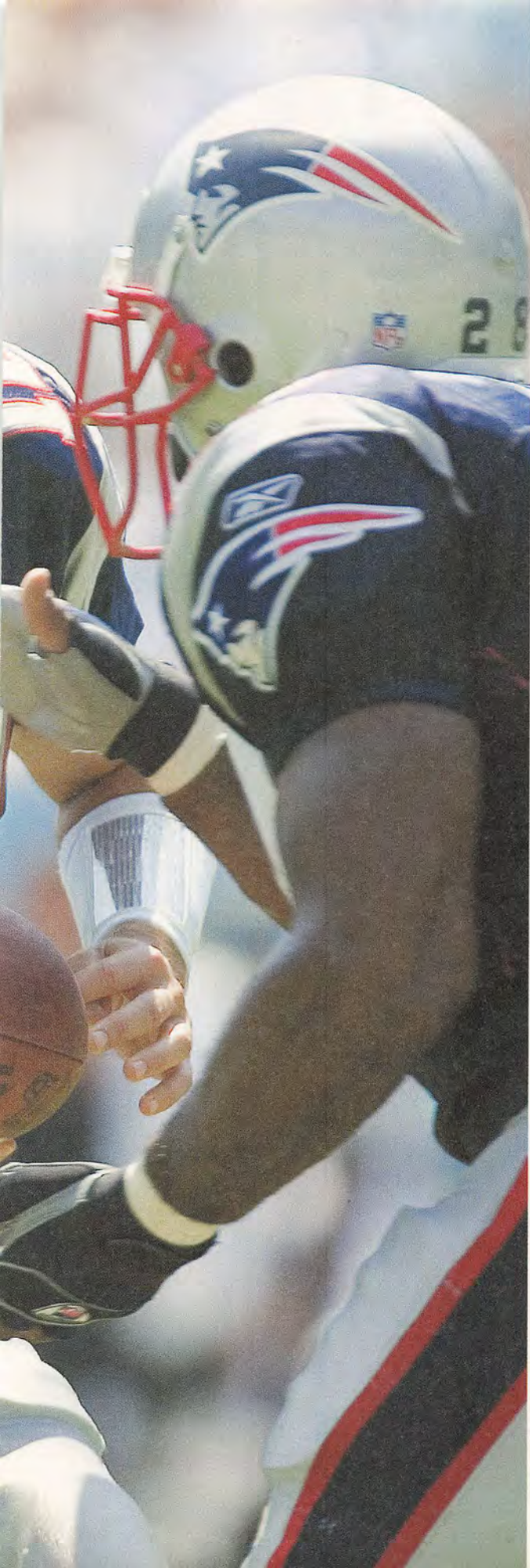
How soon we forget.

The Patriots are no strangers to offseason spending sprees. In 2001, they signed 18 veteran free agents, 15 of whom made their roster. Those personnel moves helped precipitate a run of three Super Bowl championships in four years.

Six years later, New England is going back to its future. After being no-shows in the last two big games—Lord, how it must have stuck in their craws to blow an 18-point lead over Indianapolis in the AFC championship game, then watch the Colts hoist the Lombardi Trophy two weeks later—the Patriots are setting up to make a run at another title.



# FAST AND FURIOUS



BOB LEVERONE / SN

They've convinced us. Based on what they already had and what they've added, we're picking the Patriots to make it four Super Bowl wins in seven years next February in Glendale, Ariz.

Here's what may be causing the misperception about New England's offseason habits. In 2001, they added several free agents late. For example, they signed running back Antowain Smith on June 7, linebacker Bryan Cox on July 31 and linebacker Roman Phifer on August 3.

This year, they struck early. Within an 11-day period (March 3-13), they signed tight end Kyle Brady, running back Sammy Morris, linebacker Adalius Thomas and wide receivers Donte Stallworth and Kelley Washington. They also traded for wide receiver Wes Welker.

Then, on April 29, New England played its wild card. It traded a fourth-round draft pick to the Raiders for enigmatic wide receiver Randy Moss.

During the Bill Belichick era, the Patriots have espoused team chemistry as the one constant in their success. Yet they are willing to risk contaminating that environment by bringing in a player who can be selfish, moody and divisive. Now that *is* acting out of character.

But let's imagine what could happen if Moss straightens up and flies right—right down the sideline on his familiar go routes—and

Stallworth and Welker step up big as complementary receivers. Last season, only 156 of the team's 326 completions fell into the hands of wide receivers, led by Reche Caldwell (61 receptions for 760 yards and four touchdowns) and the aging Troy Brown (43-384-4). Collectively, this new cast of receivers could put up prodigious numbers. Two things quarterback Tom Brady has always excelled at are spreading the ball and making the players around him better.

The defense remains one of the league's best and most confounding. It can morph from a 3-4 into a 4-3 in the time it takes a quarterback to take the snap and drop back to pass.

It starts up front with the steel-enforced line of Richard Seymour, Vince Wilfork and Ty Warren. The linebackers, led by Mike Vobel and Tedy Bruschi, are pesky and active. The secondary has a rising star in cornerback Asante Samuel, whose 10 interceptions tied for the league lead last season. Now comes the versatile Thomas, whose ID reads *linebacker* but whose DNA can be found almost anywhere on defense. Just one more headache for offensive coordinators.

The NFC will send the Cowboys to Arizona as its representative in Super Bowl 42, but when it's over the confetti and glitter will be falling on the Patriots.

We've watched that scene before.

**The Patriots were oh-so-close to taking Indy's spot in Super Bowl 41, and aggressive offseason moves make them the team to beat.**

## INSIDERS POLL

**Which NFC team has the best chance to win the Super Bowl?**



Based on a poll of SN's 32 team correspondents

## Joseph Addai: Now he's Da Man

As a rookie, Joseph Addai shared the Colts' running load with Dominic Rhodes. Now that Rhodes is gone, Addai, who rushed for 77 yards and caught 10 passes for 66 yards in Super Bowl 41, will be the feature back for the defending champs. He discussed his new role and other topics with SPORTING NEWS.

**SN:** What's your mindset knowing you're now the man?

**ADDAI:** From college up to now, I've been sharing time. Now people are saying it's time for me to carry the load. I really haven't been in a situation like that, but I feel I can carry it. But that's a thing I'll have to prove.

**SN:** How would you evaluate yourself as a running back?

**ADDAI:** I think my strengths are being able to do every phase of the game—catch the ball, run the ball and block. I really don't know what my weaknesses are.

**SN:** Which teammates helped you most in adjusting to the NFL?

**ADDAI:** A lot of people helped—Peyton (Manning), Dom, Reggie Wayne. I even talked to Edge (former Colts running back Edgerrin James) during the season. I would be on the phone an hour or two with him. He's been in the league for eight years. When he talks to me, I really pay attention.

**SN:** What was your welcome-to-the-NFL moment?

**ADDAI:** In our second-round playoff game against Baltimore, Ray Lewis was saying a lot of stuff. He was talking about how I was going to feel all these licks in the game. For him to actually say something about me, I thought I must have been doing something pretty good.

**SN:** What's the secret to running the Colts' signature stretch play successfully?

**ADDAI:** Understanding what the offensive line and Peyton are trying to do and where they're going with it. Timing is really important. We work on it every day—handoffs and getting our timing down.

**SN:** Which NFL running back did you admire or emulate while growing up?

**ADDAI:** I was a big Cowboys fan, so I watched Emmitt Smith a lot. I don't think my running style is like his, but when I was young I tried to do some of the things he did on the playground.

**SN:** What's something about you, on or off the field, that might surprise fans?

**ADDAI:** Before a game, a lot of players like to listen to hip-hop type of music. That's cool; I love hip-hop. But I have to listen to something that brings me down, brings me back to earth. I listen to R&B. Beyonce. I'll put her whole album on and listen to it.

**SN:** What's your favorite way to relax away from football?

**ADDAI:** I love bowling. I picked that hobby up and I can't stop doing it. Each time I go, I get better.

**SN:** Should you have been the Super Bowl MVP, or at least shared the award with Rhodes?

**ADDAI:** I don't look at it that way. Peyton has been working at this for so long and he was the one managing the game, so I really feel like he deserved it. I was just happy to be part of the team that won. —D.D.



As a rookie and even in college, Addai shared time in the backfield. This year, the Colts expect him to carry the load.

BOB LEVERONE / SN

## INSIDERS POLL

Who will be the NFL's best player in 2007?



Based on a poll of SN's 32 team correspondents

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## BONUSES

### Preseason Game Of The Year.

Won '06 Eagles (-3) over Steelers 16-7

### September College Smackdown.

Won '06 Navy (+1 1/2) UConn 41-17

### September NFL Golden Game.

Won '06 Jets (+6) Bills 28-20

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College & Pro Football Newsweekly writes: "Jim Hurley knows how to put ten kinds of information together to get one kind of result - winners."

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Customer Doug Casey writes: "An incredible record! - especially the run you had in December of 15-4- it made for a great Christmas! I'll be back next season for sure"

## The sophomore QBs

All three quarterbacks taken in the first round of the 2006 draft eventually became starters last season. Vince Young started 13 games for Tennessee, Matt Leinart started 11 for Arizona, and Jay Cutler, with Denver fighting for a playoff spot, started five. What can we expect from this trio in Year 2?

### MATT LEINART

**Pros:** Coach Ken Whisenhunt, who helped a second-year quarterback, Ben Roethlisberger, win a Super Bowl in Pittsburgh, will provide a huge boost for Leinart. The emphasis on strong line play, including the hiring of coach Russ Grimm and the drafting of tackle Levi Brown, will give Leinart more time to take advantage of wide receivers Larry Fitzgerald and Anquan Boldin downfield. Whisenhunt's play-calling creativity will help Leinart air it out more efficiently.

**Cons:** He needs to show he has no lingering effects from a left shoulder injury that ended his rookie season early. He also is learning a new offense.

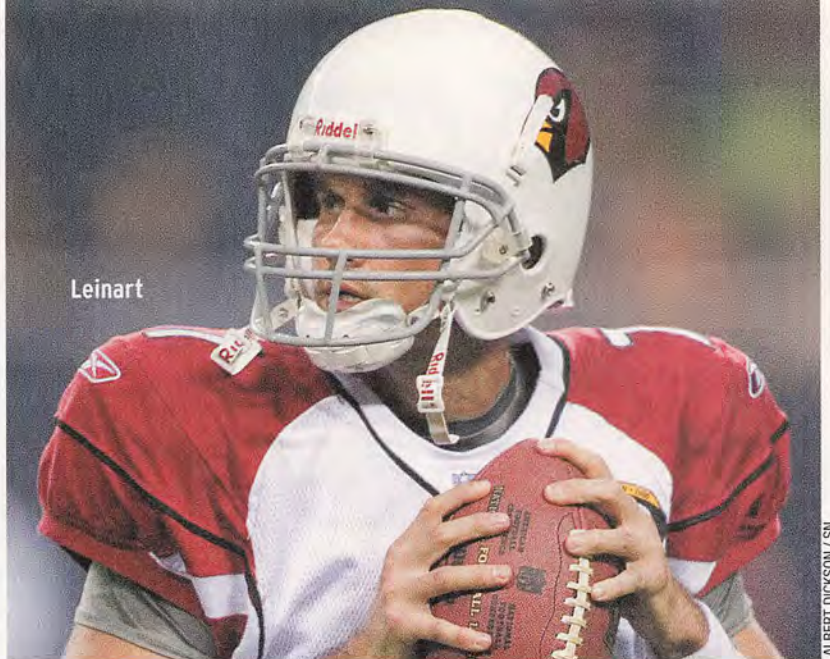
**Outlook:** Leinart will remind everyone of his Heisman-winning days at USC and earn a Pro Bowl trip to Hawaii.

### JAY CUTLER

**Pros:** His smarts and arm strength allowed him to produce quickly after taking over for Jake Plummer last season, and he can build on the experience with more confidence now that Plummer is out of the picture. Rising second-year receiver Brandon Marshall and new tight end Daniel Graham will help; so will Travis Henry's consistent tough running.

**Cons:** Cutler needs to be more consistent with his accuracy. In addition, he had some problems with ball security, fumbling eight times.

**Outlook:** Cutler will help the Broncos contend for the playoffs, but



Leinart

ALBERT DICKSON / SN

it will be another year before he develops into an elite passer.

### VINCE YOUNG

**Pros:** The leadership skills and athleticism that helped Young win a national championship at Texas quickly became evident in Tennessee, where he put the Titans on the brink of the postseason with little help around him. His passing skills were better than expected, and they will only get better under Leinart's former mentor, Norm Chow.

**Cons:** He still has little help around him, and his best returning back and receivers are trying to shake off injury woes. The defense will put him in tough situations, too.

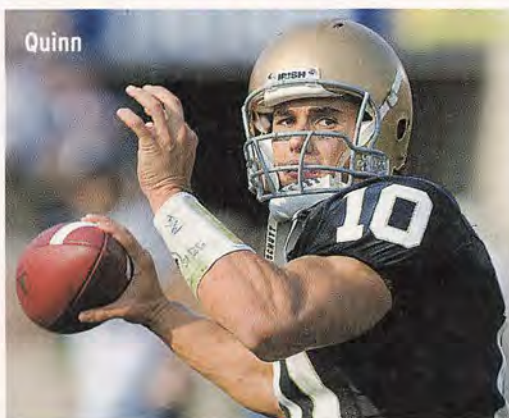
**Outlook:** Expect Young again to make plays with his feet and arm to steal a few games, but don't be surprised if he finds the continued heavy pressure to carry his team a bit overwhelming in Year 2.

—Vinnie Iyer

## The rookie QBs: Who will be better?

JaMarcus Russell ended up going 21 spots ahead of Brady Quinn in the draft, and the Raiders' decision to take Russell over Quinn at No. 1 overall was the right one. But don't expect either quarterback to have a huge impact in 2007.

There are some reasons to believe Quinn could have a little early success—assuming he beats out Charlie Frye and Derek Anderson to start right away. New power back Jamal Lewis, big-play wideout Braylon Edwards, fearless tight end Kellen Winslow and



Quinn

JAY DROWNS / SN

rookie left tackle Joe Thomas make the Browns' offensive picture much brighter than it was a year ago. But this is a work in progress, and there will be immense pressure on

Quinn to meet the high expectations of the rabid Dawg Pound and deliver as a local product. He also must face the Ravens' and Steelers' defenses twice.

Russell also is part of a rebuilding offense, and though his weapons won't be as good as Quinn's, Oakland isn't completely devoid of skill-position options. The Raiders have some quality players in the backfield (free-agent pickup Dominic Rhodes, LaMont Jordan) and

in the receiving unit (Jerry Porter, Ronald Curry, rookie tight end Zach Miller).

Expect young head coach Lane Kiffin to unleash Russell's arm by calling for throws to all parts of the field. It won't always be pretty, but the strategy will allow Russell to get comfortable while developing his great passing potential.

Quinn is more NFL-ready than Russell, but in the long run, the Raiders will show they took the right guy. Russell will become the better all-around quarterback—as both a passer and a leader—two or three seasons down the line. —V.I.

## The new head coaches

With six coaching changes this offseason, half the league's teams now have hired a new head man since Super Bowl 40. Here's how this year's group grades out in terms of chances for early success:



Petrino

JAY DROWNS / SN

### FORWARD PASSES

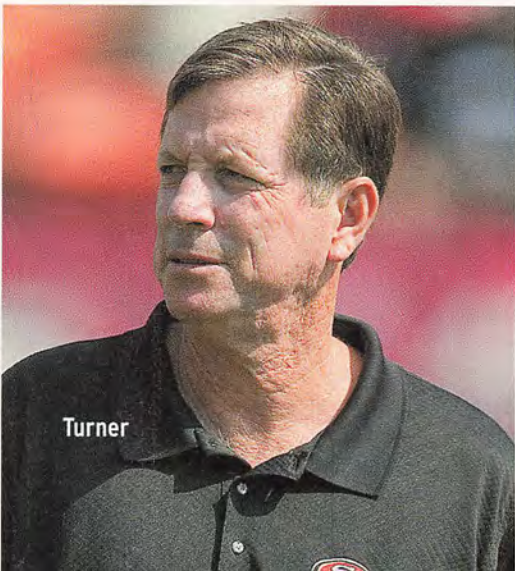
**Ken Whisenhunt, Cardinals.** His combination of sideline structure and creativity is exactly what Arizona needs. With Whisenhunt and offensive line coach Russ Grimm, the Cards can quickly become Steelers West.

**Bobby Petrino, Falcons.** Petrino's big challenge is to get Michael Vick to be more disciplined—on and off the field. Perhaps an even tougher challenge will be to stabilize a young defense.

### LATERAL MOVES

**Wade Phillips, Cowboys.** Dallas was wise not to tinker with its 3-4 defense, and Phillips' presence will improve its production. The offense's progression also will stay on course under new coordinator Jason Garrett.

**Norv Turner, Chargers.** Turner has a shaky head coaching past, but he also never had this kind of championship-caliber talent. He won't need to do too much motivating.



Turner

ROBERT SEALE / SN ARCHIVES

### INCOMPLETE

**Lane Kiffin, Raiders.** Kiffin, 32, was a wunderkind calling plays under Pete Carroll at USC, but the NFL-caliber offensive talent in Oakland does not match what he had inside that other Coliseum.

**Mike Tomlin, Steelers.** He's young (35), too, and he has a great iron-jawed scowling act to follow—Bill Cowher's 15 years, 149 wins and still-fresh Super Bowl victory. The immediate concern for Tomlin is how much tinkering he should do with the team's tradition of 3-4 defensive success.

—V.I.

## 2007 award winners (we think)

We gazed into our crystal ball and saw these individuals earning top honors for the 2007 season.

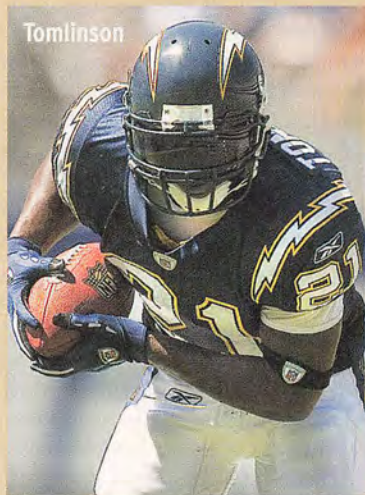
**Offensive player of the year:** LaDainian Tomlinson, RB, Chargers. Norv Turner won't come in and mess around with the league's most dynamic player.

**Defensive player of the year:** Adal-ius Thomas, LB, Patriots. It's easier to find Waldo than to figure out where the versatile Thomas is from one play to the next.

**Rookie of the year:** Calvin Johnson, WR, Lions. The 6-5 Johnson will cause some fitful nights of sleep for a lot of undersized cornerbacks.

**Comeback player of the year:** Randy Moss, WR, Patriots. If Bill Belichick and Tom Brady can't breathe Hall of Fame air back into Moss' career, it can't be done.

**Coach of the year:** Mike Nolan,



Tomlinson

ALBERT DICKSON / SN

49ers. San Francisco's steady climb under Nolan will continue with a division title in his third year.

**Super Bowl MVP:** Tom Brady, QB, Patriots. Pretty soon, he'll have one of these awards for every supermodel girlfriend. —D.D.

## Sleepers? More like risers



Benson has had his share of detractors after being the fourth overall pick in 2005 and failing to emerge as a star. But with Jones out of the picture, this should be his year.

Here are a dozen players to keep both eyes on in 2007. Blink and you just might miss their rises to stardom.

**Cedric Benson, RB, Bears.** Benson hasn't exactly endeared himself to fans and teammates in two years of limited action. But now that he's healthy and officially is the guy in Chicago's backfield after Thomas Jones was traded to the Jets, Benson is ready to deliver.

**Patrick Crayton, WR, Cowboys.** There's a reason Dallas re-signed Crayton and didn't draft a receiver. Terry Glenn and Terrell Owens will start in 2007, but Crayton should get frequent big-play opportunities as a No. 3. By 2008, he'll move up a notch.

**Kevin Curtis, WR, Eagles.** This speedster will take full advantage of the opportunity to catch plenty of passes from Donovan McNabb; he'll pick up where Donte Stallworth left off.

**Daniel Graham, TE, Broncos.** It seems strange to tab someone to "break out" in his sixth NFL season, but Graham's blocking and receiving skills are ideal for Denver's offense (see: Shannon Sharpe).

**Tamba Hali, DE, Chiefs.** Hali started every game as a rookie and played well opposite established pass rusher Jared

Allen. With more line help inside and another year under Herm Edwards, Hali is bound for double-digit sacks after leading the Chiefs with eight last year.

**A.J. Hawk, OLB, Packers.** Has there been a more appropriate last name for a free-flowing linebacker who's always around the ball? Hawk's tackling, pass-rushing and takeaway skills are already impressive, and he's dedicated to staying in shape and improving his game.

**Vincent Jackson, WR, Chargers.** It took a while for the chemistry between Jackson and quarterback Philip Rivers to develop in the receiver's second year, but by December he had busted out as Rivers' big-play scoring target. At 6-5, 241, Jackson's outlook is scary-good.

**Sean Jones, S, Browns.** Coming out

of college in '04—before the start of his NFL career was derailed by a knee injury—Jones was regarded as highly as the Redskins' Sean Taylor. Jones, who's coming off a five-pick season, now is in position to be the better all-around playmaker.

**J.P. Losman, QB, Bills.** He finally got a chance to start for a full season and quietly finished 11th in the league in both TD passes (19) and passer rating (84.9). With his athleticism, continued maturation and rapport with stud receiver Lee Evans, Losman no longer will be that "other" first-round quarterback of the 2004 draft (after Eli Manning, Rivers and Ben Roethlisberger).

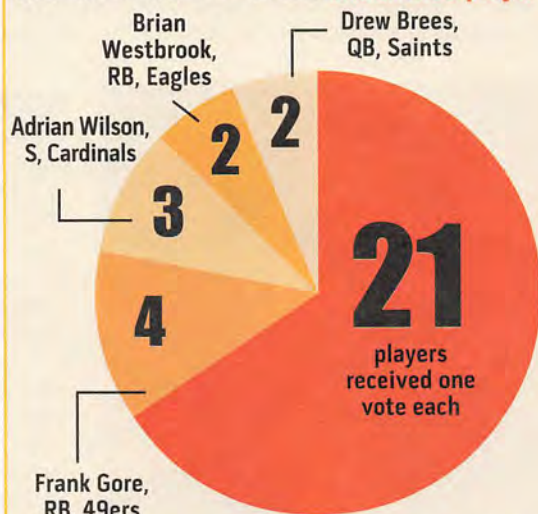
**Laurence Maroney, RB, Patriots.** As a rookie, he did a bit too much dancing to be consistently productive as a change of pace to Corey Dillon, although those moves helped him shine on kickoff returns. With Dillon gone and a season under his belt, Maroney will put his power and speed together.

**Ernie Sims, OLB, Lions.** There haven't been many first-round hits in Motown, but Sims' speed and range will make him the soul of Detroit's defense for several outstanding years to come.

**Alex Smith, QB, 49ers.** Although Smith may not wow us with great individual stats, his smarts and athleticism will be crucial to the Niners' getting enough wins to contend in the NFC West. It helps that explosive athletes Frank Gore and Vernon Davis are part of his supporting cast.

—V.I.

### INSIDERS POLL Who is the NFL's most underrated player?

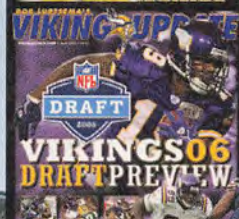
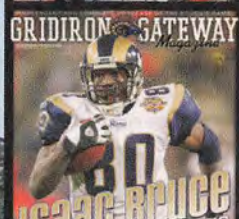
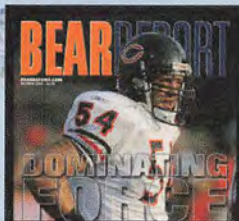
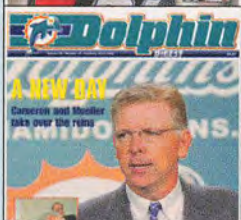
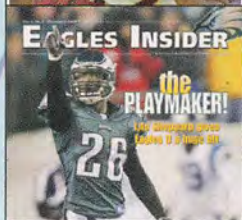
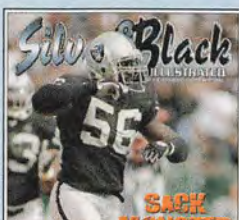
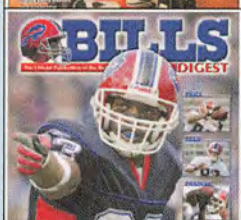
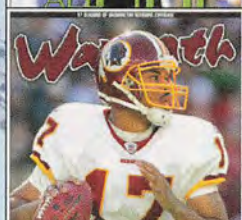
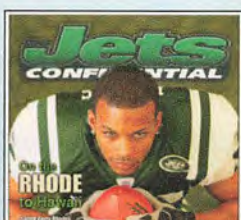


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## Lane Kiffin: Young and confident

At 32, former USC offensive coordinator Lane Kiffin is the youngest head coach in the NFL. He spoke with *SPORTING NEWS* about gearing up for his rookie season with the Raiders.

**SN:** You made a lot of changes to the Raiders' coaching staff; past Raiders coaches haven't been able to do that. How did you manage to pull that off?

**KIFFIN:** It was part of the interview process, Al (Davis) feeling me out and seeing if I was the right fit for him. And also seeing if there were some things I felt were needed to give myself and the new situation the best chance to win. There were definite areas where I needed to bring in people who fit what I was trying to get done here.

**SN:** What areas on the staff did you want to change the most?

**KIFFIN:** I evaluated the staff that was here and interviewed everyone. I decided to keep a few of them on defense. I didn't keep anyone who was on offense. I made wholesale changes there. It was a direction I thought we had to go. We have guys who are familiar with the things I want to get done and have the same philosophies I do.

**SN:** Did Al Davis resist any of the changes you proposed, or were you given carte blanche to shape the staff?

**KIFFIN:** He was in favor of every change we made.

**SN:** How do you plan to change the Raiders' culture of losing?

**KIFFIN:** It's one day at a time. It's not that far removed from winning. It hasn't been 20 years since they were winning. It's only been five years. You don't have to change everything. It's small things here and there.

**SN:** Do you think you'll have enough time to get it done?

**KIFFIN:** Yes, I do. I have no reason not to believe that in my dealings with Al.

**SN:** The Raiders' offense was awful last year. Where do you begin fixing it?

**KIFFIN:** It all started with the staff I hired.

Kiffin believes his overhaul of the offensive coaching staff was the first step toward making a dreadful offense respectable.

BEN MARGOT / AP

I went and got the best line coach I've ever interviewed or been around in Tom Cable. His line helped lead the league in rushing last year in Atlanta. He has had great success wherever he has been running the football. He was offensive coordinator at UCLA, he was head coach at Idaho, offensive coordinator at Colorado. So you're talking about a guy who isn't just a line coach. This is a guy who gets it. He understands offense. He was very familiar with the system that I'm from, which is primarily a zone-running system. It was a perfect fit.

**SN:** Will the Raiders still run a largely vertical offense?

**KIFFIN:** Our offense is very similar to what we did at SC. We also brought (offensive coordinator) Greg Knapp here. He has a background in the West Coast offense, which is very similar to what I do.

**SN:** How quickly do you believe the Raiders can compete for a playoff spot?

**KIFFIN:** We'll be good when we get good. I don't know when that time will be. The sooner our guys buy into what we're doing, the sooner we'll be better. —Tom Dienhart

## SCOUT TAKES

### Opinions from pro scouts around the NFL

The side effect of the **Randy Moss** acquisition is the truth about **Tom Brady's** arm is going to come into play. Now he's going to have to step up and show what he can do. Can he be accurate deep? ... You'd probably think the Ravens are starting to age because their leaders on offense and defense—**Steve McNair** and **Ray Lewis**—are two older guys. But their integration of young guys balances things out. ... **Clancy Pendergast**, the Cardinals' defensive coordinator, is a bit of a risk taker and innovator. He does some things some guys would say are a bit unsound, but he has success. He knows an offense's strengths and is pretty good at figuring out your tendencies. ... I don't know if **Ted Washington** is what he once was because he was absolutely dominating at the peak of his career. But I still think he brings value to nose tackle for the Browns because you can't move him with a single blocker. ... If wide receiver **Darrell Jackson's** frame of mind is good and his durability is up to par—a couple of wild cards—then he has a chance to be productive in San Francisco. But he also has a chance to be a distraction. ... I think linebacker **Jonathan Vilma** fits the Jets' 3-4. A lot of people think he's too small, but he's athletic and is going to make some plays another guy couldn't make. ... **Shaun Phillips** is definitely emerging as a good NFL linebacker. He's not as physical or as nasty as his teammate, **Shawne Merriman**, nor does he have Merriman's size and explosiveness. But he has extremely good athletic ability and good size. ... Someone once told me that winning the Super Bowl buys five years or so (for a coach). If that's the case, **Jon Gruden's** time is about up in Tampa.

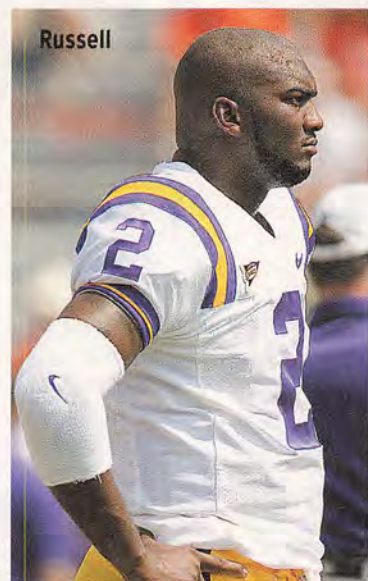
## Offseason stock watch

**BUY Patriots.** There were obvious needs in the defensive back seven and at wide receiver, and the team addressed them nicely with the drafting of safety Brandon Meriweather and the acquisitions of linebacker Adalius Thomas and veteran wide receivers Randy Moss, Donte' Stallworth and Wes Welker. New England was a solid Super Bowl contender even before making those moves.

**49ers.** Expect the 3-4 defense to be much improved because of five new starters, including veteran cornerback Nate Clements and rookie linebacker Patrick Willis. The offense will be better, too. Darrell Jackson fills a major void for a No. 1 wideout.

**Cowboys.** They beefed up their offensive line with Leonard Davis, and safety Ken Hamlin, their other major free-agent pickup, fills another big hole. Dallas took care of another need by drafting Anthony Spencer, a complementary edge pass rusher who's perfect for the 3-4.

**Raiders.** There was nowhere to go but up on offense. Standing out among the moves was the addition of top draft pick JaMarcus Russell at quarterback and the subtraction of Moss.



BOB LEVERONE / SN

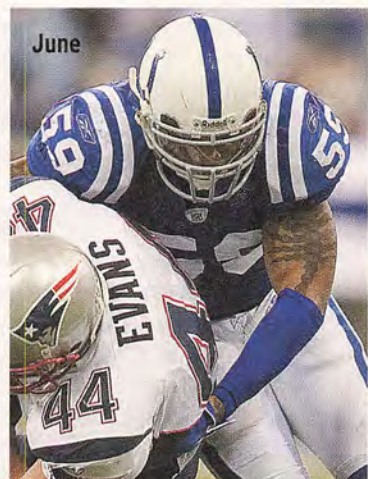
## SELL

**Bills.** Buffalo took some major hits. On defense, it lost its top corner, Clements, and lost plenty of linebacker experience in London Fletcher-Baker and Takeo Spikes. On offense, the Bills didn't add any big playmakers for quarterback J.P. Losman, and they will miss Willis McGahee's attitude and running style.

**Titans.** The pressure is back on coach Jeff Fisher and quarterback Vince Young to carry this team. Young's supporting cast got even younger when wideout Drew Bennett and running back Travis Henry departed and cornerback Pacman Jones was suspended for the season.

**Redskins.** Their defense needed speed and a pass-rush boost, yet their only notable signing was Fletcher-Baker, who is slowing down in the middle. Washington has invested too much in overpriced veterans and not enough in draft picks in recent years.

**Colts.** Winning a Super Bowl means losing players who cash in for big paydays elsewhere. The biggest hits were outside linebacker Cato June and both starting cornerbacks, Nick Harper and Jason David. —V.I.



ALBERT DICKSON / SN



# FANTASY FOOTBALL

If this looks like a questionable ranking of the top players in the NFL, well, it is. These are the top players based on their value in fantasy football, which doesn't always mesh with "real" football player rankings. Use this round-by-round list, produced by the experts at Fantasy Source Football, as a starting point for your draft preparation. Then check in regularly at Fantasy Source for rankings updates and guidance in setting weekly lineups, scouring the waiver wire, making trades and all the other moves that will make you a fantasy champion. For all the latest news and fantasy analysis, go to [fantasy.sportingnews.com/nfl](http://fantasy.sportingnews.com/nfl).

## 1ST ROUND

1. LaDainian Tomlinson, RB, S.D.
2. Larry Johnson, RB, K.C.
3. Steven Jackson, RB, St.L.
4. Frank Gore, RB, S.F.
5. Shaun Alexander, RB, Sea.
6. Brian Westbrook, RB, Phi.
7. Joseph Addai, RB, Ind.
8. Rudi Johnson, RB, Cin.
9. Willie Parker, RB, Pit.
10. Reggie Bush, RB, N.O.
11. Peyton Manning, QB, Ind.
12. Ronnie Brown, RB, Mia.

## 2ND ROUND

13. Clinton Portis, RB, Was.
14. Edgerrin James, RB, Ari.
15. Maurice Jones-Drew, RB, Jac.
16. Steve Smith, WR, Car.
17. Chad Johnson, WR, Cin.
18. Laurence Maroney, RB, N.E.
19. Willis McGahee, RB, Bal.
20. Travis Henry, RB, Den.
21. Terrell Owens, WR, Dal.
22. Marvin Harrison, WR, Ind.
23. Thomas Jones, RB, NYJ
24. Torry Holt, WR, St.L.

## 3RD ROUND

25. Cedric Benson, RB, Chi.
26. Antonio Gates, TE, S.D.
27. Reggie Wayne, WR, Ind.
28. Brandon Jacobs, RB, NYG
29. Carson Palmer, QB, Cin.
30. Deuce McAllister, RB, N.O.
31. Larry Fitzgerald, WR, Ari.
32. Javon Walker, WR, Den.
33. Donald Driver, WR, G.B.
34. Marion Barber, RB, Dal.
35. Roy Williams, WR, Det.
36. Drew Brees, QB, N.O.

## 4TH ROUND

37. Marques Colston, WR, N.O.
38. Lee Evans, WR, Buf.
39. T.J. Houshmandzadeh, WR, Cin.
40. Cadillac Williams, RB, T.B.
41. Anquan Boldin, WR, Ari.
42. Andre Johnson, WR, Hou.
43. Jerious Norwood, RB, Atl.
44. Ahman Green, RB, Hou.
45. Randy Moss, WR, N.E.
46. LaMont Jordan, RB, Oak.
47. DeAngelo Williams, RB, Car.
48. Plaxico Burress, WR, NYG

## 5TH ROUND

49. Tom Brady, QB, N.E.
50. Marc Bulger, QB, St.L.
51. Marshawn Lynch, RB, Buf.
52. Tony Gonzalez, TE, K.C.
53. Kevin Jones, RB, Det.
54. Adrian Peterson, RB, Min.
55. Chris Chambers, WR, Mia.
56. Darrell Jackson, WR, S.F.
57. Braylon Edwards, WR, Cle.
58. Chester Taylor, RB, Min.
59. Fred Taylor, RB, Jac.
60. Jamal Lewis, RB, Cle.

## 6TH ROUND

61. Hines Ward, WR, Pit.
62. Todd Heap, TE, Bal.
63. Mark Clayton, WR, Bal.
64. Warrick Dunn, RB, Atl.
65. Donovan McNabb, QB, Phi.
66. Reggie Brown, WR, Phi.
67. Calvin Johnson, WR, Det.
68. Vernand Morency, RB, G.B.
69. LenDale White, RB, Ten.
70. Santana Moss, WR, Was.
71. Bernard Berrian, WR, Chi.
72. Jericho Cotchery, WR, NYJ



Reggie Bush flashed enough big-play pizzazz as a rookie to earn a highly coveted spot on the top 10 list for fantasy rankings.

## 7TH ROUND

73. Laveranues Coles, WR, NYJ
74. Michael Vick, QB, Atl.
75. Julius Jones, RB, Dal.
76. Tatum Bell, RB, Det.
77. Matt Hasselbeck, QB, Sea.
78. Alge Crumpler, TE, Atl.
79. Brandon Jackson, RB, G.B.
80. Chris Henry, RB, Ten.
81. Terry Glenn, WR, Dal.
82. Philip Rivers, QB, S.D.
83. Ladell Betts, RB, Was.
84. Donte Stallworth, WR, N.E.

## 8TH ROUND

85. Chris Cooley, TE, Was.
86. Jeremy Shockey, TE, NYG
87. Joey Galloway, WR, T.B.
88. Deion Branch, WR, Sea.
89. DeShaun Foster, RB, Car.
90. Vernon Davis, TE, S.F.
91. Leon Washington, RB, NYJ
92. Kellen Winslow, TE, Cle.
93. Jerry Porter, WR, Oak.
94. Bears defense
95. Anthony Thomas, RB, Buf.
96. Michael Turner, RB, S.D.

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1. The betting line must be soft, & must offer at least a 2-3 point edge to the better. They are made soft by the circumstances impacting the game.

2. If one is going to bet on a favorite that team must have a dramatically superior edge in talent - If I am using an underdog, all I need is two teams of equal ability.

3. The team I am using must play consistently near the top of its performance profile, be it favorite or underdog.

Those three elements are the beginning of the handicapping process. Bettable games are then given a unit rating.

An example of how a team gets a 100-unit rating & qualifies for a game of the year play is last season's College Game of the Year. I selected Louisville (-13½) at Kansas State. Louisville met all 3 of the above requirements and then graded out with a 94% chance to win and cover. My figures said the Cardinals should have been a 17½-point favorite, which meant we had a 4-point edge going in. Louisville had a tremendous edge in talent on both sides of the ball and a history of playing consistently at the top of its performance profile, while Kansas State did not.

The bottom line for me: find the better football team that is under-valued, that always plays well & has

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This past football season he released 44 games rated from 25 units to 100 units, and here is his record:

100-UNIT RATED GAMES 4-0-1 100% WINNERS  
50-UNIT RATED GAMES 15-8-0 65% WINNERS  
25-UNIT RATED GAMES 12-1-0 92% WINNERS  
25-UNIT PARLAYS 3-0-0 100% WINNERS  
34-9-1 RECORD IN BIG GAME PLAYS 79% WINNERS

100-UNIT WINNERS		4-0-1
Sept. 10	NFL Game Of The Month Chicago (-3 ½) 26, Green Bay 0	100 Units WINNER
Sept. 17	College Game Of The Year Louisville (-13 ½) 24, Kansas State 6	100 Units WINNER
Oct. 8	NFL Game Of The Year Philadelphia (-2 ½) 38, Dallas 24	100 Units WINNER
Oct. 22	Wiseguy Leaders Game Carolina (+3) 14, Cincinnati 17	100 Units PUSH
Oct. 29	NFL Dominating Power Play Chicago (-15 ½) 41, San Francisco 10	100 Units WINNER
50-UNIT WINNERS		15-8-0
Sept. 17	AFC Game Of The Year San Diego (-11) 40, Tennessee 7	50 Units WINNER
Oct. 1	NFC Game Of The Year Chicago (-3 ½) 37, Seattle 6	50 Units WINNER
Oct. 2	NFC Monday Night Game Of The Year Philadelphia (-11) 31, Green Bay 9	50 Units WINNER
Oct. 14	PAC-10 Game Of The Year Oregon (-9) 30, UCLA 20	50 Units WINNER
Oct. 26	ACC Game Of The Year Clemson (-4) 7, Virginia Tech 24	50 Units LOSS
Oct. 28	SEC Game Of The Year Auburn (-18) 23, Mississippi 17	50 Units LOSS
Oct. 29	Chairman's Club Game Of Month New York Jets (+2) 13, Cleveland 20	50 Units LOSS
Nov. 2	College Grudge Game Of The Year Louisville (-21) 44, West Virginia 34	50 Units WINNER
Nov. 4	College Game Of The Month LSU (-3 ½) 28, Tennessee 24	50 Units WINNER
Nov. 5	Sunday Night Game Of The Year Indianapolis (-3) 27, New England 20	50 Units WINNER
Nov. 9	Big East Game Of The Year Rutgers (+6) 28, Louisville 25	50 Units WINNER
Nov. 11	College Upset Game Of The Month Oregon (+9 ½) 10, Southern California 35	50 Units LOSS
Nov. 12	NFC Game Of The Month Detroit (-6 ½) 13, San Francisco 19	50 Units LOSS
Nov. 16	The Backyard Brawl West Virginia (-9 ½) 45, Pittsburgh 27	50 Units WINNER
Nov. 18	Big Ten Championship Game Michigan (+7) 39, Ohio State 42	50 Units WINNER
Nov. 19	AFC Rivalry Game Of The Year San Diego (-3) 25, Denver 77	50 Units WINNER
Nov. 20	Monday Night Game Of The Month Giants (+4) 19, Jacksonville 26	50 Units LOSS
Nov. 26	AFC Game Of The Month Oakland (+13 ½) 14, San Diego 21	50 Units WINNER
25-UNIT GAMES		12-1-0
Dec. 2	ACC Championship Game Wake Forest (+2) 9, Georgia Tech 6	25 Units WINNER
Dec. 11	SEC Championship Game Arkansas (+2 ½) 28, Florida 38	25 Units LOSS
Dec. 17	Big 12 Championship Game Nebraska (+3 ½) 7, Oklahoma 21	25 Units LOSS
Dec. 11	Monday Night Game Of The Month Chicago (-4) 42, St. Louis 27	25 Units WINNER
Dec. 17	NFL Total Of The Year Kansas City/San Diego Under 46½ (29 Points Scored)	25 Units WINNER
Aug. 25	NFL Pre-Season Game Of The Year Giants (-3 ½) 13, Jets 7	25 Units WINNER
Sept. 1	College Upset Game Of The Month East Carolina (+12 ½) 23, Navy 28	25 Units WINNER
Sept. 8	College Game Of The Month Auburn (-21 ½) 34, Mississippi State 0	25 Units WINNER
Sept. 15	Friday Night Game Of The Year Tolado (-5) 37, Kansas 31 (201)	25 Units WINNER
Sept. 22	Nevada (-7) 31, Northwestern 21	25 Units WINNER
Sept. 23	Big Ten Game Of The Year Ohio State (-17) 28, Penn State 6	25 Units WINNER
Oct. 5	TCU (-2) 7, Utah 20	25 Units LOSS
Oct. 8	Florida St. (-23) 51, Duke 24	25 Units WINNER
Oct. 21	College Upset Game Of The Month Rutgers (+6) 20, Pittsburgh 10	25 Units WINNER
Oct. 23	Giants (+3) 36, Dallas 22	25 Units WINNER
Nov. 24	Texas Game Of The Year Texas A&M (+13) 12, Texas 7	25 Units WINNER
Nov. 25	S. Carolina (+5½) 31, Clemson 28	25 Units WINNER
25-UNIT NFL PARLAYS		3-0
Dec. 4	Monday Night Side & Total Parlay Eagles (+3) 27, Panthers 24 Over 37 ½	10 Units WINNER
Dec. 7	Parlay Of Eagles & The Over Philadelphia (+6 ½) 23, Dallas 7	5 Units WINNER
Dec. 7	NFL Thursday Night Side & Total Pittsburgh (-7) 27, Cleveland 7 Under 34 Points	5 Units PUSH
Dec. 25	Parlay Of Steelers & The Under Philadelphia (+6 ½) 23, Dallas 7	5 Units WINNER
Dec. 25	NFL Parlay Of The Month Philadelphia (+6 ½) 23, Dallas 7 Jets (-3) 13, Miami 10 Parlay Of Philadelphia and Jets	10 Units WINNER

(These games listed above that are not designated as special plays were released as part of Kelso's regular football services)

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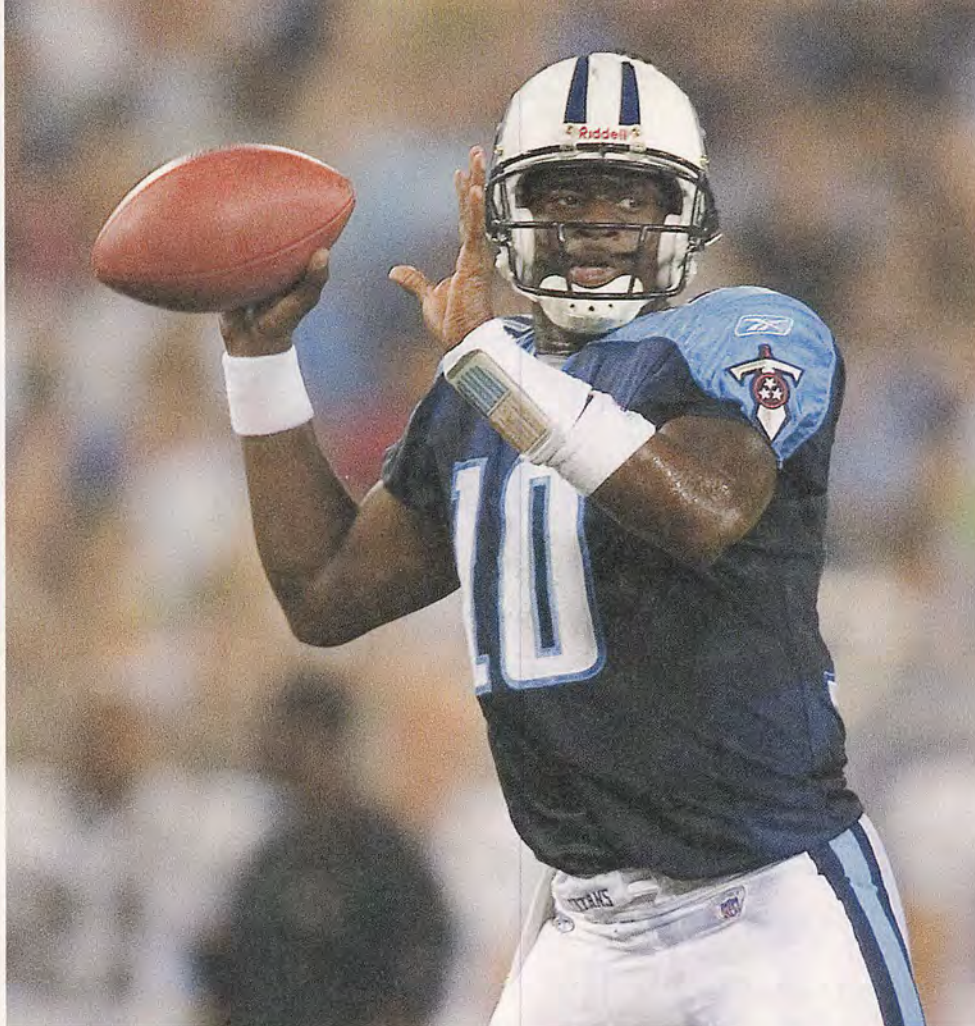
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ALBERT DICKSON / SN

**Leadership and charisma don't earn you fantasy points, which is why a player such as Vince Young merits a ninth-round grade.**

## 15TH ROUND

- 169. Jets defense
- 170. Jason Campbell, QB, Was.
- 171. Ernest Wilford, WR, Jac.
- 172. Michael Robinson, RB, S.F.
- 173. Zach Miller, TE, Oak.
- 174. Steve McNair, QB, Bal.
- 175. Nate Washington, WR, Pit.
- 176. Eagles defense
- 177. Tony Hunt, RB, Phi.
- 178. Tony Scheffler, TE, Den.
- 179. Adam Vinatieri, K, Ind.
- 180. Sammy Morris, RB, N.E.

## 9TH ROUND

- 97. Tony Romo, QB, Dal.
- 98. Matt Leinart, QB, Ari.
- 99. Dominic Rhodes, RB, Oak.
- 100. Ravens defense
- 101. Santonio Holmes, WR, Pit.
- 102. Brandon Jones, WR, Ten.
- 103. Vince Young, QB, Ten.
- 104. Jason Witten, TE, Dal.
- 105. Reuben Droughns, RB, NYG
- 106. Eli Manning, QB, NYG
- 107. Isaac Bruce, WR, St.L.
- 108. Kenny Irons, RB, Cin.

## 10TH ROUND

- 109. Ron Dayne, RB, Hou.
- 110. Eddie Kennison, WR, K.C.
- 111. L.J. Smith, TE, Phi.
- 112. Corey Dillon, RB
- 113. Matt Jones, WR, Jac.
- 114. Patriots defense
- 115. Greg Jones, RB, Jac.
- 116. Keyshawn Johnson, WR
- 117. Kevin Curtis, WR, Phi.
- 118. Greg Jennings, WR, G.B.
- 119. Ben Watson, TE, N.E.
- 120. Ben Roethlisberger, QB, Pit.

## 11TH ROUND

- 121. Chargers defense
- 122. Randy McMichael, TE, St.L.
- 123. Muhsin Muhammad, WR, Chi.
- 124. Joe Horn, WR, Atl.
- 125. D.J. Hackett, WR, Sea.
- 126. Jay Cutler, QB, Den.
- 127. Drew Bennett, WR, St.L.
- 128. Amani Toomer, WR, NYG
- 129. Jake Delhomme, QB, Car.
- 130. Robert Meachem, WR, N.O.
- 131. Derrick Mason, WR, Bal.
- 132. Brandon Marshall, WR, Den.

## 12TH ROUND

- 133. Dolphins defense
- 134. Vincent Jackson, WR, S.D.
- 135. J.P. Losman, QB, Buf.
- 136. Panthers defense
- 137. Mike Bell, RB, Den.
- 138. Devery Henderson, WR, N.O.
- 139. Marty Booker, WR, Mia.
- 140. T.J. Duckett, RB, Det.
- 141. Steelers defense
- 142. Arnaz Battle, WR, S.F.
- 143. Ronald Curry, WR, Oak.
- 144. Brett Favre, QB, G.B.

## 13TH ROUND

- 145. Sidney Rice, WR, Min.
- 146. Eric Parker, WR, S.D.
- 147. Wes Welker, WR, N.E.
- 148. Najeh Davenport, RB, Pit.
- 149. Michael Jenkins, WR, Atl.
- 150. Chris Henry, WR, Cin.
- 151. Adrian Peterson, RB, Chi.
- 152. Desmond Clark, TE, Chi.
- 153. Broncos defense
- 154. Heath Miller, TE, Pit.
- 155. Jon Kitna, QB, Det.
- 156. Patrick Crayton, WR, Dal.

## 14TH ROUND

- 157. Alex Smith, QB, S.F.
- 158. Dallas Clark, TE, Ind.
- 159. Bobby Engram, WR, Sea.
- 160. Byron Leftwich, QB, Jac.
- 161. Jaguars defense
- 162. Mike Furrey, WR, Det.
- 163. Michael Pittman, RB, T.B.
- 164. Owen Daniels, TE, Hou.
- 165. Joe Jurevicius, WR, Cle.
- 166. Dwayne Bowe, WR, K.C.
- 167. Terrance Copper, WR, N.O.
- 168. Bo Scaife, TE, Ten.

## 16TH ROUND

- 181. Chad Pennington, QB, NYJ
- 182. Dwayne Jarrett, WR, Car.
- 183. Ted Ginn, WR, Mia.
- 184. Lorenzo Booker, RB, Mia.
- 185. Maurice Morris, RB, Sea.
- 186. Nate Kaeding, K, S.D.
- 187. Marcel Shipp, RB, Ari.
- 188. Seahawks defense
- 189. Ashley Lelie, WR, S.F.
- 190. Robbie Gould, K, Chi.
- 191. Neil Rackers, K, Ari.
- 192. Shayne Graham, K, Cin.

## 17TH ROUND

- 193. Bryant Johnson, WR, Ari.
- 194. Jeff Wilkins, K, St.L.
- 195. Rex Grossman, QB, Chi.
- 196. Josh Brown, K, Sea.
- 197. Chris Simms, QB, T.B.
- 198. Colts defense
- 199. Matt Stover, K, Bal.
- 200. Jason Elam, K, Den.
- 201. Matt Schaub, QB, Hou.
- 202. Olindo Mare, K, N.O.
- 203. Mike Nugent, K, NYJ
- 204. Joe Nedney, K, S.F.

★ PASSING  
★ KICKING  
★ RUNNING  
★ DEFENSE  
★ COACHING

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# AFC PREVIEW

## East

### 1. Patriots 14-2

Despite issues at linebacker and wide receiver, the Patriots were a play away from the Super Bowl a year ago. Additions such as Adalius Thomas and Randy Moss will get them there this season.

### 2. Jets 9-7

After leading the Jets into the playoffs as a rookie head coach, Eric Mangini will avoid a sophomore slump with an improved 3-4 defense and a more consistent running game.

### 3. Bills 5-11

Although J.P. Losman will take another step forward even without Willis McGahee, the defense will take a few steps back without Nate Clements, Takeo Spikes and London Fletcher-Baker.

### 4. Dolphins 5-11

The defense remains strong, but quarterback questions will hold Miami back. This will be a difficult first year for coach Cam Cameron.

## South

### 1. Colts 13-3

Some free-agent departures—especially on defense—hurt the chances of a Super Bowl repeat, but Peyton Manning and Tony Dungy will keep the champs among the AFC's best.

### 2. Jaguars 8-8

Although Jacksonville has proved it can smack around opponents with physical play in the running game and on defense, the lack of big plays on both sides of the ball is a sizable concern.

### 3. Titans 7-9

Vince Young's reward for playing so well as a rookie? A very disappointing offseason in which the team did little to get Young some help. Pacman Jones' yearlong suspension was the only notable news.

### 4. Texans 7-9

Matt Schaub and Ahman Green will help the offense, and Mario Williams and DeMeco Ryans will continue to boost the defense. Neither unit, however, is quite playoff-worthy.

## Wild-card games

Colts over Ravens, Bengals over Broncos

## Divisional games

Patriots over Bengals, Chargers over Colts

## North

### 1. Bengals 10-6

The Bengals will get a boost from Carson Palmer's improved health and defensive adjustments by Marvin Lewis and return to their playoff-caliber level of two years ago.

### 2. Ravens 9-7

Willis McGahee will add pop to the backfield to help Steve McNair, and the defense will continue to be a takeaway machine. But it's hard to stay at an elite level in a tough division and conference.

### 3. Steelers 7-9

Ben Roethlisberger won't be all out of sorts again, but the defense might be with some secondary concerns and rookie coach Mike Tomlin's potential schematic adjustments.

### 4. Browns 3-13

Cleveland is the weak sister in an otherwise strong division. It shapes up as a long season considering the lack of experience at quarterback and problems with the run defense.

## West

### 1. Chargers 14-2

Though Norv Turner won't deliver an elusive Super Bowl berth, LaDainian Tomlinson, Shawne Merriman and the rest of the team's elite talent will carry San Diego to another dazzling regular season.

### 2. Broncos 10-6

Expect Jay Cutler to go from impressive young passer to confident young leader in his second year, which will help compensate for considerable turnover in defensive personnel.

### 3. Chiefs 8-8

The defense will improve again under coach Herm Edwards, but a change at quarterback will prevent Kansas City from keeping up with the more explosive offenses in San Diego and Denver.

### 4. Raiders 3-13

Considering the youth of coach Lane Kiffin and quarterback JaMarcus Russell, Raider Nation must show great patience with the offense while expecting more good play from the defense.

## AFC championship game

Patriots over Chargers

## Super Bowl 42

Patriots over Cowboys

# PREDICTIONS





BALTIMORE

AFC

## RAVENS

The team has a great defense, a new-look running game—and a lot of age. It's now or never.

**SN PICK** 2nd, AFC North (9-7)

By Mike Preston

»»» **T**he Ravens proved last season they had enough talent to make the postseason. Now they have to prove that appearance was a prelude to a deeper run and not a last hurrah.

Of the team's 22 starters, nine are 30 or older, including marquee players Ray Lewis, Steve McNair, Derrick Mason, Samari Rolle and Trevor Pryce. Despite storming to a 13-3 regular-season record in 2006, the Ravens managed just two field goals in their playoff loss to the Colts. McNair and the running game looked tired even though they had two weeks of rest before the game.

Can a team with so many players in the twilight of their careers position themselves for a Super Bowl run? Can the Ravens overcome a tougher schedule and keep the injuries to a minimum? The Ravens say their window of opportunity isn't about to close.

"When you've got future Hall of Famers playing at a Pro Bowl level, who cares if they're 32, 33 or 34?" owner Steve Bisciotti says. "To me, they are winners, not old."

Deep down, though, a lot of people know this might be the last go-round for some great players.

## OFFENSE

The Ravens will get away from running out of the I-formation except in the red zone. Instead, they will spread the field with more three- and four-receiver packages and two-tight end sets. Newly acquired running back Willis McGahee is more versatile than power-running predecessor Jamal Lewis, so coordinator Rick Neuheisel can present multiple looks.

**Quarterbacks**—McNair played well last season despite not joining the team until late in the offseason. He gave the Ravens swagger and confidence—but also proved he no longer can carry an offense. The team hopes McGahee will keep defenses off-balance and set up play-action passes. Because of numerous injuries, McNair has become a short-to-midrange passer who loves to throw to his tight ends. The implementation of multiple formations likely will suit McNair well—he is good at reading defenses and improvising.

Kyle Boller, a three-year starter until last season, played well filling in for McNair in two games last season. Boller was

## SCHEDULE

All times Eastern

Sept. 10	at Cincinnati*	7:00
Sept. 16	N.Y. JETS	4:15
Sept. 23	ARIZONA	1:00
Sept. 30	at Cleveland	1:00
Oct. 7	at San Francisco	4:15
Oct. 14	ST. LOUIS	1:00
Oct. 21	at Buffalo	1:00
Oct. 28	Open date	
Nov. 5	at Pittsburgh*	8:30
Nov. 11	CINCINNATI	4:05
Nov. 18	CLEVELAND	1:00
Nov. 25	at San Diego	4:15
Dec. 3	NEW ENGLAND*	8:30
Dec. 9	INDIANAPOLIS	8:15
Dec. 16	at Miami	1:00
Dec. 20	at Seattle	4:15
Dec. 30	PITTSBURGH	1:00

Strength of schedule: T-11th

\*Monday

Analysis of every Ravens game:  
sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom



effective and put the long ball back in the offense, though he still lacks McNair's

accuracy on short and intermediate passes.

Rookie fifth-round pick Troy Smith needs to improve his mechanics, but he's a great leader who has a shot to stick and develop into the top backup in 2008. He'll battle Drew Olson for the No. 3 job. **GRADE: B+**

**Running backs**—The Ravens got rid of a veteran malcontent in Lewis for a younger malcontent in McGahee, but they hope a change of scenery will change the attitude McGahee displayed in Buffalo. It should. McGahee will be playing for a legitimate Super Bowl contender, and he has a strong rapport with Ray Lewis and Ed Reed, who also are former Miami players. On paper, McGahee wasn't any more productive in Buffalo than Jamal Lewis was in Baltimore last season, but McGahee is younger and more versatile. Lewis required a lead blocker; McGahee will operate as the lone back most of the time. McGahee is a better receiver and blocker than Lewis.

Mike Anderson didn't get many touches last season but was productive when he did play.

Anderson is a one-cut back who runs with power. Musa Smith has a great burst and good vision but can't remain healthy.

When the team uses a fullback, Justin Green could get the call. He has decent hands but isn't a devastating blocker. He'll be pushed for playing time by rookie Le'Ron McClain, who eventually will become the starter. McClain is superb as a lead blocker and a weapon out of the backfield as a receiver. **GRADE: B**

**Receivers**—Neuheisel is expected to use more multiple-receiver sets in the hopes of finding mismatches in the secondary and turning them into big



BOB LEVERONE / SN

plays. The player most capable of doing that is Demetrius Williams, who will start out as the No. 3 receiver but likely will see his role grow after a strong rookie season. He has great speed and burst, which allow him to gain separation from most cornerbacks.

The Ravens also need to keep Mason and Mark Clayton involved. Mason is more of a possession type at this point in his career. Clayton has the ability to be a possession and game-breaking receiver. The Ravens like to use him on short passes because of his ability to make yards after the catch.

Devard Darling is more of a midrange receiver, and Clarence Moore has speed and explosiveness. Both have played well at times, but neither has shown enough consistency.

Opposing defenses have a tough time matching up with tight end Todd Heap, who has great hands and leaping ability. Because the Ravens want to go downfield more, look for Heap to be used more on the outside because of his playmaking ability. When the team uses two-tight end formations, Quinn Sypniewski will be used in a blocking role. **GRADE: B-**

**Line**—With Lewis, the Ravens were a methodical, downhill running team. The move to McGahee will mean more tosses, sweeps, traps and misdirections. The Ravens likely won't have a problem making the change in style because most of their linemen are versatile and athletic.

Despite his 6-9, 345-pound frame, left tackle Jonathan Ogden always has been able to pull and get to the second level. At right tackle, Adam Terry is more versatile than last year's starter, Tony Pashos, though Terry lacks Pashos' power and needs to improve his lower-body strength. Terry also serves as the Plan B at left tackle in case Ogden is injured.

## SCOUT TAKES

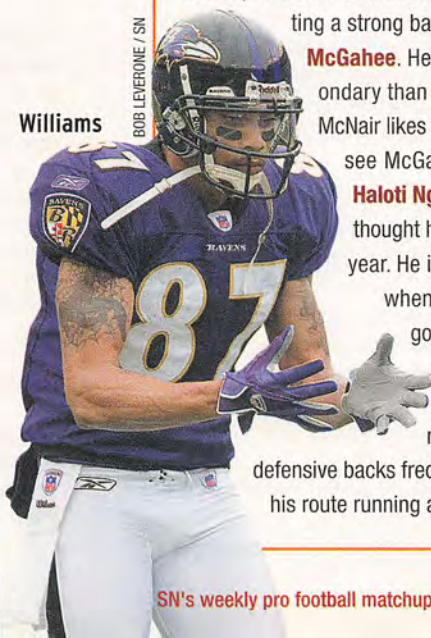
### A scout from another team sizes up the Ravens

**Steve McNair** runs now only when he has to, and he's far more patient than he has ever been. At the same time, you can't go to sleep because he'll throw it deep on you. ... They're getting a strong back, a three-down back, in **Willis McGahee**. He'll make more plays in the secondary than **Jamal Lewis** did. With the way McNair likes to use checkdowns, I think you'll see McGahee catch 55 passes easy. ...

**Haloti Ngata** is a strong, powerful man. I thought he was dominant at the point last year. He is a run stuffer and is disruptive when he penetrates upfield. But he's got to work on his pass-rush technique. ... **Demetrius Williams** showed some flashes as a third receiver last year. He got behind defensive backs frequently. He still needs to work on his route running and to get physically stronger.

Williams

BOB LEVERONE / SN





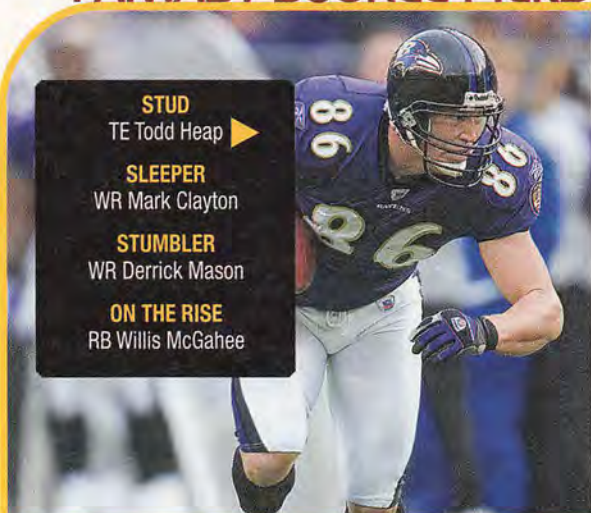
## FANTASY SOURCE PICKS

**STUD**  
TE Todd Heap ▶

**SLEEPER**  
WR Mark Clayton

**STUMBLER**  
WR Derrick Mason

**ON THE RISE**  
RB Willis McGahee



BOB LEVERONE / SN

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The team also will have an athletic upgrade at left guard, where 345-pound Edwin Mulitalo played last season. His replacement is Jason Brown, a promising player who appears ready for full-time duty in his third season.

Center Mike Flynn is a solid player but will be 33 when the season starts and could get pushed out by Chris Chester, who has good athleticism but needs to bulk up to survive a full season inside. Chester filled in well when right guard Keydrick Vincent missed time last season.

Vincent can engulf smaller defenders, but he struggles in pass protection and has missed 11 games over the past two seasons.

Keep an eye on guard Ben Grubbs, the Ravens' rookie first-rounder. Grubbs probably won't start at the beginning of the season but will eventually find his way into the lineup. He is smart and has good power, as well as the athleticism to make blocks at the second level.

With the exception of Chester, the Ravens have no proven depth. Backup guard Ikechuku Ndukwe (6-4, 338) and backup tackle Mike Kralcik (6-8, 337) have big-time size but have bounced on and off the active roster and have little experience. Rookie Marshal Yanda will develop behind Ogden and Terry.

It's vital for the starters to stay healthy—and for the line to run-block better than it did a year ago—for the team to make a serious playoff run. **GRADE: C+**

## DEFENSE

Coordinator Rex Ryan believes in attacking instead of being attacked; the Ravens will blitz about 75 percent of the time and come from anywhere on the field. This is a versatile unit that operates efficiently out of a three- or a four-man front. It's difficult to prepare for the Ravens because they shuffle around players so much, but opponents that can neutralize the linebackers have a chance for success.

**Line**—This group's mission is pretty simple. The tackles are expected to keep blockers off inside linebackers Lewis and Bart Scott. The ends are asked to collapse the pocket and bring pressure from the outside.

Pryce always has had the reputation of being a strong pass

## SCOUTING REPORTS: OFFENSE

## ↓ Steve McNair, QB

**Strengths:** Will play through pain. Has excellent arm strength and throws a great slant pass. Delivers under pressure. Has an excellent feel for the rush. Strong and confident and can break tackles.

**Weaknesses:** Has awkward throwing motion with a short follow-through. Has lost flexibility, mobility and speed. Looks old and broken-down at times. Has questionable vision and holds the ball too long waiting for his primary receiver to get open.

**Bottom line:** McNair still is a tough competitor but is on the downside of his career. He needs a strong cast of playmakers around him to have success. **Grade: 7.0**

## ↑ Willis McGahee, RB

**Strengths:** Has outstanding power and good straight-line speed. Shows exceptional quickness and burst through the hole. A slashing runner with good patience and vision. Excels at finding cutback lanes. Best between the tackles but has the speed to turn the corner consistently. Has a second gear in the open field. Pushes the pile in short-yardage situations.

**Weaknesses:** Durability and toughness are questionable. Tends to pout when things aren't going well.

**Bottom line:** McGahee has the speed and elusiveness to give the Ravens the outside running game they have lacked. He also can pound it between the tackles when necessary and will benefit from coach Brian Billick's run-first scheme. **Grade: 6.6**

## ↑ Mark Clayton, WR

**Strengths:** Has good hands and can get deep. Runs precise routes, particularly outside the hash marks. Has good quickness and explosion out of his cuts.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks strength and power. Struggles when jammed by bigger corners and can get bounced around downfield.

**Bottom line:** Clayton showed in '06 that he can be a serious deep threat and reliable target. He has tons of potential. **Grade: 7.2**

## ↓ Derrick Mason, WR

**Strengths:** Displays excellent burst off the line and in and out of his cuts. Shows elite change-of-direction skills

and can make defenders miss in the open field. Does a good job creating separation. Has good leaping ability and can make tough catches in a crowd.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks prototypical size and has had trouble staying healthy. No longer is a deep threat. At 33, will wear down more easily.

**Bottom line:** Mason still can contribute, but his production dipped significantly in 2006. **Grade: 7.1**

## ↑ Demetrius Williams, WR

**Strengths:** A big target with good hands. Quick off the line and in and out of his cuts, which allows him to gain separation. Can make the tough catch over the middle and in traffic. Tracks the ball well in the air. Excels against man coverage because of his size and burst.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to add bulk to his skinny frame. Must improve his recognition skills against zone coverage. Needs to improve his route-running skills, particularly in the short and intermediate passing game.

**Bottom line:** Williams developed quickly as a rookie and became a viable deep threat. He likely will become a fine all-around receiver and could compete for a starting job this season. **Grade: 6.8**

## Todd Heap, TE

**Strengths:** One of the league's best pass-catching tight ends. A rare athlete who can go over the middle and make catches in traffic. Has excellent concentration. Tough to tie up when he releases on his routes.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks power and base on run blocks and struggles to hold up at the point of attack. Can be too upright when he sets up his routes and doesn't dominate in the red zone.

**Bottom line:** Heap continues to make plays and move the chains. Despite his reputation for getting nicked up, he actually has started 16 games in four of the past five seasons. **Grade: 8.5**

## ↓ Jonathan Ogden, T

**Strengths:** Has rare size, power and athletic ability. A physical player with excellent upper- and lower-body strength. Rarely is out of position. Has good stunt awareness and a nasty streak. Adjusts well to spin moves. Very hard to beat around the edge.

Players are graded by War Room scouts on a 1-10 scale.  
\*Rookies (not graded)

Wins battles on initial contact. Gets off the ball and into his set quickly. Can engulf pass rushers.

**Weaknesses:** Doesn't show a lot of range and can get pushed around some. Has had some problems with countermeasures. Loses contact sometimes after the first hit.

**Bottom line:** Ogden is an elite talent, but he does not work as hard as he should in the offseason and that is beginning to take its toll. **Grade: 9.0**

### Adam Terry, T

**Strengths:** A terrific athlete with a wide wingspan. Shows good speed and body control. Quick enough to handle speed rushers and block linebackers. Has strong hands and good flexibility. Uses leverage well.

**Weaknesses:** Lack of lower-body strength makes him a run-blocking liability. Lacks explosion on contact. Gets a little top-heavy. Must add more bulk to his lean frame.

**Bottom line:** Terry probably will be the starting right tackle, but he needs better lower-body strength to be consistently effective.

**Grade: 6.4**

### Keydrick Vincent, G

**Strengths:** Has excellent size and strength and can engulf undersized defenders. Plays with good leverage, gets a nice initial pop and can move the pile in the interior running game.

**Weaknesses:** Has limited athletic ability. Takes too long to get set, is slow out of his stance and lacks the lateral mobility to be an effective pass blocker.

**Bottom line:** Vincent is a physical player who uses his strength to anchor against defenders. His ability to play both guard spots makes him valuable.

**Grade: 6.4**

### ↑ Jason Brown, G

**Strengths:** Has outstanding size, strength and power. Can hold up against mammoth two-gap tackles. Also can play center.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks mobility but compensates with excellent technique and awareness.

**Bottom line:** Brown is a good young player who has excellent size and plays with power. **Grade: 6.0**

### Mike Flynn, C

**Strengths:** A productive, consistent player. A tough competitor; will play with nicks. Athletic for a center.

Shows deceptive quickness and mobility.

C.J. GUNTHER FOR SN



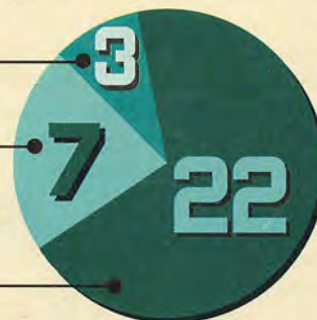
## INSIDERS POLL

Going from Jamal Lewis to Willis McGahee at RB will:

Be a wash, at best, for the Ravens — 3

Put the Ravens on the road to the Super Bowl — 7

Upgrade the running game but not as much as the Ravens would like — 22



Based on a poll of SN's 32 team correspondents

## BOLD PREDICTIONS

**1** The offense will be more explosive under Rick Neuheisel. He has an innovative mind and gave the offense some different looks after former coordinator Jim Fassel was fired.

**2** OLB Terrell Suggs, who is entering the last year of his contract, will rank in the top three in the NFL in sacks. Suggs loves sacks; he loves money even more.

**3** WR Derrick Mason will last only four games before he starts feuding with coaches over not getting the ball enough. Usually, he doesn't start pouting until late in the season.

rusher, but he also excelled at stopping the run in 2006. He has an excellent combination of speed and power. Pryce sometimes will work as the lone end or the team will slide up outside linebacker Terrell Suggs to play opposite Pryce. That causes problems for opponents because either Suggs or Pryce will often be one-on-one with a blocker in passing situations.

Right end Haloti Ngata is a 340-pound load who can fight through double-teams and use his quickness to disrupt plays. Kelly Gregg is somewhat undersized (6-0, 310) for a nose tackle but excels at stopping the run. He uses his compact body to get leverage on blockers, and he has improved his stamina.

Dwan Edwards and Justin Bannan are part of the line rotation. Edwards can play tackle or end, though he doesn't provide much of a pass-rush push when coming from the outside. Bannan isn't explosive off the snap but makes some plays just through effort. Also in the mix is Atiyah Ellison, a 2005 third-round pick by the Panthers who has some pass-rush potential.

**GRADE: A**

**Linebackers**—Even without the

**Weaknesses:** Isn't a dominant run blocker at the point of attack. Struggles if matched against a big 3-4 nose tackle. Lacks lower-body strength.

**Bottom line:** Flynn is a solid starter but is on the downside of his career; he will turn 33 before training camp opens.

**Grade: 6.7**

**KEY:** ↑ Ascending ↓ Descending



versatile Adalius Thomas, who signed with the Patriots, this unit will give opponents multiple looks—it's a chess game the Ravens enjoy playing. Take Lewis, who still has sideline-to-sideline speed but has trouble fighting off linemen. He can play on the strong or weak side in the 4-3 or plays inside with Scott in the 3-4.

Scott is coming off a breakout year. He was the team's best pass rusher in 2006 before opponents realized they had to account for him on every play. Scott also can drop deep in coverage and is a sound tackler. Look for him to assume many of Thomas' myriad roles while Jarret Johnson assumes much of Scott's blitzing responsibility, but he lacks the athleticism to be used like Thomas.

Another strength of the defense is Suggs' versatility. A pass-rushing force, he can apply pressure as an end or off the edge as an outside linebacker. Suggs also is effective dropping into coverage, and the Ravens do a great job of disguising his role from play to play.

Though Dennis Haley, Gary Stills and Tim Johnson can line up inside or outside, they lack the playmaking ability of those in front of them—they combined for no sacks and interceptions last season. If any of those players is on the field a lot, it spells trouble for the defense. Fourth-round pick Antwan Barnes has pass-rushing skills; he could figure in the mix. **GRADE: A-**

**Secondary**—The Ravens have loads of talent in the secondary, but the communication must improve. There were too many costly breakdowns last season.

The word on Rolle last season was that he had lost a step, and opponents burned him for several big plays. The coaches believe he played better and showed more confidence late in the season, but if that doesn't carry over into 2007, the team might have to gamble with a younger player such as Evan Oglesby or Ronnie Prude. On the other side, cornerback Chris McAlister has matured and played at a high level last sea-

## SCOUTING REPORTS: DEFENSE

### ↑ Haloti Ngata, E

**Strengths:** Has a wide, massive build but still shows good agility, initial quickness and lateral movement. Possesses freakish

### Trevor Pryce, E

**Strengths:** Tougher against the run than most ends. Explodes off the ball and gets on blockers quickly. Has excellent body control and is light on his feet. An explosive hitter. Has long arms and uses a club move to get separation.

**Weaknesses:** Comes off the ball high and can be cut. Gets sloppy with his hands.

**Bottom line:** Pryce played at a high level in 2006 and tied his career high with 13 sacks. He uses his length and athletic ability to make plays that many ends can't make. **Grade: 8.2**

### Kelly Gregg, T

**Strengths:** A nasty player with a relentless motor. A classic short, stocky nose tackle—but also can play end. Plays with leverage at the point of attack; gets low and plays with excellent knee bend. Has a quick first step and can make plays in the backfield.

**Weaknesses:** Needs rest to stay fresh. A limited pass-rush threat. Misses some tackles because he fails to wrap up.

**Bottom line:** Gregg will not be outthrust or outworked and fits perfectly in the Ravens' defense. **Grade: 7.7**

### ↓ Ray Lewis, LB

**Strengths:** A tough, aggressive, high-intensity player. Shows excellent sideline-to-sideline range. Takes good angles and has excellent initial pop. An explosive hitter and tackler and plays with a mean streak.

**Weaknesses:** Can be overaggressive and overrun plays. Can get engulfed if he doesn't beat linemen to the spot.

**Bottom line:** Lewis still can carry the defense at times. He shows rare leadership skills and makes his teammates better. **Grade: 8.9**

### Terrell Suggs, LB

**Strengths:** An excellent athlete with size, quickness, body control and

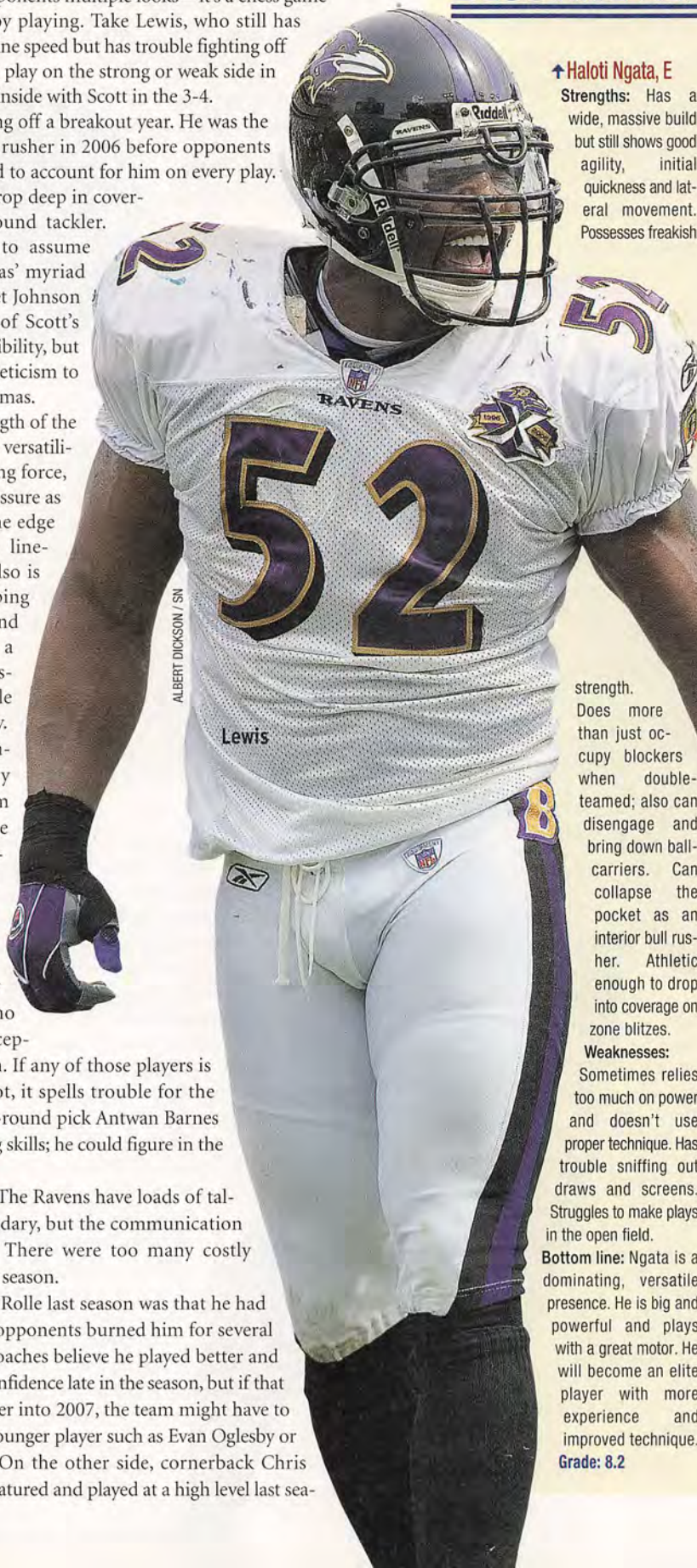
strength.

Does more than just occupy blockers when double-teamed; also can disengage and bring down ball-carriers. Can collapse the pocket as an interior bull rusher. Athletic enough to drop into coverage on zone blitzes.

**Weaknesses:**

Sometimes relies too much on power and doesn't use proper technique. Has trouble sniffing out draws and screens. Struggles to make plays in the open field.

**Bottom line:** Ngata is a dominating, versatile presence. He is big and powerful and plays with a great motor. He will become an elite player with more experience and improved technique. **Grade: 8.2**



ALBERT DICKSON / SN

Lewis

change-of-direction skills. Plays a lot faster than his 40 time would indicate. Has the quickness to get to the edge and makes a lot of big plays.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to improve his run defense and ability to fend off blockers. Tends to rush too wide and take himself out of plays.

**Bottom line:** Suggs is an excellent pass rusher and growing into a complete player. **Grade: 8.0**

#### ↑Bart Scott, LB

**Strengths:** A tough, physical player at the point of attack. Versatile and smart. Will take on the lead blocker with force and then shed him. Good in man coverage.

**Weaknesses:** Has average speed. Will get caught peeking in zone coverage and lose his man.

**Bottom line:** Scott improves every year. He is aggressive and eventually could replace Lewis as the leader of the defense. **Grade: 7.9**

#### ↑Jarret Johnson, LB

**Strengths:** A straight-line player who wins a lot of one-on-one battles with pure effort. Has a feel for blocking schemes and can react quickly.

**Weaknesses:** Not powerful and struggles to hold up at the point of attack. Can get knocked back at the second level.

**Bottom line:** Johnson is versatile and athletic and plays with a great motor. With the departure of Adalius Thomas, Johnson will get a chance to take over on the right side. **Grade: 6.0**

#### Chris McAlister, CB

**Strengths:** Has size, strength and speed. Footwork and hip movement are smooth and fluid. Physical in coverage. Can match up with anyone in man coverage but performs best against big, physical receivers. Redirects receivers at the line and is a hard hitter after the catch. Shows good awareness in zone coverage and is a reliable tackler. Backpedals well and has excellent leaping ability.

**Weaknesses:** Gives too much cushion at times and occasionally goes too low and misses tackles. Holds and grabs downfield. Struggles against double moves and often gambles and gets out of position.

**Bottom line:** McAlister's ability to shut

down the opponent's top receiver gives the front seven time to get to the quarterback and allows the Ravens to take risks. **Grade: 8.9**

#### ↓Samari Rolle, CB

**Strengths:** Shows excellent quickness, agility and balance. Wastes very little motion as he moves to the ball. Displays soft hands and excellent ball skills. Shows recovery speed and acceleration.

**Weaknesses:** Skinny and somewhat fragile. Can be lazy with his technique and gives up easy completions to the inner half of the field. Gambles and gets out of position. An average tackler.

**Bottom line:** Rolle still has good ability, but he must stay healthy and play with confidence. **Grade: 7.9**

#### Ed Reed, S

**Strengths:** A big-time player with excellent tools. Smooth and fluid and plays fast. Has quick feet and excellent instincts. Does a nice job baiting the quarterback into making bad decisions. Has the burst to recover when out of position. Shows excellent range when the ball is in the air. Has the best ball skills of any safety. Has soft hands and is a threat to score every time he takes the ball away.

**Weaknesses:** Will gamble and get out of position at times. Freelances and lacks discipline in coverage. Durability is a slight concern.

**Bottom line:** Few safeties can dominate like Reed. He is one of the top defensive players in the game. **Grade: 9.2**

#### Dawan Landry, S

**Strengths:** Has good size and a muscular build. A punishing hitter who plays with a mean streak. An excellent open-field tackler. Sees the field well, takes good angles to the ball and has a great closing burst. Effective in the box and on the blitz.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks the speed to turn and run with fast receivers. Gets fooled on play-action and double moves and lacks the athleticism to recover.

**Bottom line:** Landry makes up for a lack of physical tools with instinctive play and a nonstop motor. He started as a rookie and should improve. **Grade: 6.9**

son. He is physical and can shut down top-notch wideouts.

Free safety Ed Reed left Rolle vulnerable a couple of times by freelancing instead of providing over-the-top help. Only by the end of the season did Reed actually play like his old self. He doesn't need to freelance; he makes enough plays staying within the system. The Ravens now have a thumper in the secondary in Dawan Landry, and the coverage will improve after he gained experience as a rookie in 2006.

Corners Oglesby, Prude and Corey Ivy are solid in nickel and dime packages. They don't gamble but are capable in coverage. Prude showed a good nose for the ball as a rookie. At safety, Gerome Sapp is the top backup. He won't make a ton of plays but can act like an extra linebacker against the run. **GRADE: B+**

## KEY MOVES

### 2007 DRAFT PICKS

Rd.-Pick

GRADE **C+**

1-29 Ben Grubbs, G, Auburn

Just a matter of time before he starts. Needs to work on his technique.

3-74 Yamon Figurs, WR/KR, Kansas State

Route running and toughness are concerns.

3-86 Marshal Yanda, G/T, Iowa

Will develop behind Jonathan Ogden and Adam Terry. Lacks bulk.

4-134 Antwan Barnes, OLB, Florida International

Special teamer for now; might be a pass rusher later.

4-137 Le'Ron McClain, FB, Alabama

Has a good chance of beating out Justin Green for a starting spot.

5-174 Troy Smith, QB, Ohio State

Great leader. Mechanics need work. Might be the backup in '08.

6-207 Prescott Burgess, LB, Michigan

Has great instincts and reactions but is still a project.

### VETERAN PLAYERS

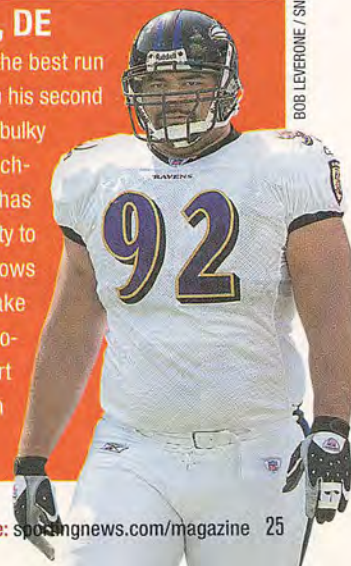
**Additions:** RB Willis McGahee (trade/Bills).

**Losses:** NT Aubrayo Franklin (FA/49ers), RB Jamal Lewis (FA/Browns), FB Ovie Mughelli (FA/Falcons), G Edwin Mulitalo (FA/Lions), OT Tony Pashos (FA/Jaguars), LB Adalius Thomas (FA/Patriots).

## SECRET WEAPON

### HALOTI NGATA, DE

He will become one of the best run stoppers in the league in his second season. Ngata is big and bulky but not fat. He can bench-press the world and has good quickness. His ability to occupy two blockers allows the linebackers to make plays. By midseason, opponents will have to start finding ways to run around Ngata.



BOB LEVERONE / SN

## SPECIAL TEAMS

Matt Stover, 39, doesn't get much distance on his kickoffs, but a great defense usually bails him out. And he is as clutch a performer on field goals as you'll find. Punter Sam Koch became a weapon last season by regularly pinning opponents inside the 20.

## STADIUM/MEDIA

M&T Bank Stadium (70,701, artificial)

Tickets: 410-261-7283

Training camp: McDaniel College, Westminster, Md.; 410-701-4000  
Radio: WBAL-AM (1090); 98 Rock (97.9 FM)

Website: baltimoreravens.com

The Ravens have dynamic performers on their coverage units, but their own return game has questions. Returner B.J. Sams was having a great season and was regularly jump-starting the offense with good field position before breaking his ankle; he must show he's healthy. If

not, the team might be forced to use rookie Yamon Figurs, who can flat-out fly and is a threat any time he touches the ball.

**GRADE: B**

## BOTTOM LINE

The Ravens didn't improve significantly in the offseason, but the rest of the division hasn't gotten much better, either. Look for them to be in the hunt for the AFC North title. The key to the season will be how well the offensive line and McGahee come together. **SN**

Mike Preston covers the Ravens for the Baltimore Sun.



BOB LEVERONE / SN

## PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

## OFFENSE

**QB** ■ Steve McNair  
■ Kyle Boller  
**FB** ■ Justin Green  
■ Le'Ron McClain  
**RB** ■ Willis McGahee  
■ Mike Anderson  
**WR** ■ Mark Clayton  
■ Demetrius Williams  
**WR** ■ Derrick Mason  
■ Clarence Moore  
**TE** ▲ Todd Heap  
■ Quinn Sypniewski  
**LT** ▲ Jonathan Ogden  
■ Adam Terry  
**LG** ■ Jason Brown  
■ Ikechukwu Ndukwe  
**C** ■ Mike Flynn  
■ Chris Chester  
**RG** ■ Keydrick Vincent  
■ Ben Grubbs  
**RT** ■ Adam Terry  
■ Mike Kralcick

## DEFENSE

**LE** ■ Trevor Pryce  
■ Dwan Edwards  
**NT** ■ Kelly Gregg  
■ Dwan Edwards  
**RE** ■ Haloti Ngata  
■ Atiyah Ellison  
**OLB** ▲ Terrell Suggs  
■ Jarret Johnson  
**ILB** ■ Bart Scott  
■ Tim Johnson  
**ILB** ▲ Ray Lewis  
■ Dennis Haley  
**OLB** ■ Jarret Johnson  
■ Antwan Barnes  
**LCB** ▲ Chris McAlister  
■ Evan Oglesby  
**SS** ■ Dawan Landry  
■ Jerome Sapp  
**FS** ▲ Ed Reed  
■ Jerome Sapp  
**RCB** ■ Samari Rolle  
■ Corey Ivy

## SPECIALISTS

**K** ▲ Matt Stover  
**P** ■ Sam Koch  
▲ Elite ■ Solid ● Adequate ○ Fringe

Depth charts updated weekly at [sportingnews.com](http://sportingnews.com)

## RAVENS ROSTER

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL exp.	College	How acq.	2006 GP/GS
QUARTERBACKS							
7	Kyle Boller	6-3/220	6/17/81	5	California	D1b/03	5/0
9	Steve McNair	6-2/235	2/14/73	13	Alcorn State	FA/06	16/16
10	Drew Olson	6-2/222	6/6/83	2	UCLA	FA/06	0/0
11	Troy Smith	6-0/225	7/20/84	R	Ohio State	D5/07	—
RUNNING BACKS							
38	Mike Anderson	6-0/230	9/21/73	8	Utah	FA/06	16/0
30	P.J. Daniels	5-10/214	12/21/82	2	Georgia Tech	D4b/06	0/0
33	Justin Green (FB)	5-11/251	4/30/82	3	Montana	D5/05	12/3
37	Le'Ron McClain (FB)	6-0/260	12/27/84	R	Alabama	D4b/07	—
23	Willis McGahee	6-0/228	10/20/81	5	Miami	T-Buf/07	14/14
40	Cory Ross	5-6/201	9/22/82	2	Nebraska	FA/06	4/0
32	Musa Smith	6-0/232	5/31/82	5	Georgia	D3/03	12/0
RECEIVERS							
43	Rob Abiamiri (TE)	6-2/240	12/21/82	2	Maryland	FA/05	0/0
80	Alex Bannister	6-5/207	4/23/79	7	Eastern Kentucky	FA/06	2/0
14	Romby Bryant	6-1/181	12/21/79	3	Tulsa	FA/06	0/0
89	Mark Clayton	5-10/193	7/2/82	3	Oklahoma	D1/05	16/12
81	Devard Darling	6-1/215	4/16/82	4	Washington State	D3/04	1/0
16	Yamon Figurs	5-11/175	1/10/83	R	Kansas State	D3a/07	—
86	Todd Heap (TE)	6-5/252	3/16/80	7	Arizona State	D1/01	16/16
85	Derrick Mason	5-10/190	1/17/74	11	Michigan State	FA/05	16/15
84	Clarence Moore	6-6/211	9/24/82	4	Northern Arizona	D6b/04	10/1
88	Quinn Sypniewski (TE)	6-6/270	4/14/82	2	Colorado	D5b/06	16/3
83	Daniel Wilcox (TE)	6-1/245	3/23/77	4	Appalachian State	FA/04	14/6
87	Demetrius Williams	6-2/198	3/28/83	2	Oregon	D4a/06	16/0
DEFENSIVE LINEMEN							
60	Jason Brown (G/C)	6-3/320	5/5/83	3	North Carolina	D4/05	16/12
65	Chris Chester (G/C)	6-3/305	1/12/83	2	Oklahoma	D2/06	11/4
62	Mike Flynn (C)	6-3/305	6/15/74	10	Maine	FA/97	16/16
66	Ben Grubbs (G)	3-3/315	3/10/84	R	Auburn	D1/07	—
70	Mark Katula (LS)	6-6/272	8/22/82	3	Wisconsin	FA/05	16/0
74	Michael Kralcick (T)	6-8/337	9/9/82	2	San Diego State	FA/05	1/0
63	Ikechukwu Ndukwe (G)	6-4/338	7/17/82	2	Northwestern	FA/06	5/0
75	Jonathan Ogden (T)	6-9/345	7/31/74	12	UCLA	D1a/96	14/14
76	Chris Pino	6-5/315	3/18/82	2	San Diego State	FA/06	0/0
69	Brian Rimpf (G)	6-5/319	2/11/81	3	East Carolina	D7/04	0/0
78	Adam Terry (T)	6-8/330	9/1/82	3	Syracuse	D2b/05	16/2
68	Keydrick Vincent (G)	6-5/325	4/13/78	7	Mississippi	FA/05	12/12
73	Marshal Yanda (T)	6-4/310	9/15/84	R	Iowa	D3b/07	—
DEFENSIVE LINEMEN							
94	Justin Bannan (T)	6-3/305	4/18/79	6	Colorado	FA/06	11/1
53	Dan Cody (E/LB)	6-5/255	12/1/81	3	Oklahoma	D2/05	2/0
48	Jim Cottrell (E/LB)	6-0/245	1/13/83	2	New Mexico St.	FA/06	0/0
93	Dwan Edwards (T)	6-3/315	5/16/81	4	Oregon State	D2/04	8/0
72	Atiyah Ellison (T)	6-3/318	9/29/81	3	Missouri	FA/06	0/0
97	Kelly Gregg (T)	6-0/310	11/1/76	8	Oklahoma	FA/00	16/16
95	Jarret Johnson (E/LB)	6-3/270	8/14/81	5	Alabama	D4a/03	16/2
71	Kenny King (T)	6-4/285	4/23/81	5	Alabama	FA/07	0/0
92	Haloti Ngata (T)	6-4/340	1/21/84	2	Oregon	D1/06	16/16
90	Trevor Pryce (E/T)	6-5/286	8/3/75	11	Clemson	FA/06	16/16
56	Gary Stills (E/LB)	6-2/250	7/11/74	9	West Virginia	FA/06	16/0
55	Terrell Suggs (E/LB)	6-3/260	10/11/82	5	Arizona State	D1a/03	16/15
LINEBACKERS							
50	Antwan Barnes	6-1/240	10/19/84	R	Florida International	D4a/07	—
54	Prescott Burgess	6-3/240	3/6/84	R	Michigan	D6/07	—
58	Dennis Haley	6-1/247	2/18/82	3	Virginia	FA/05	9/0
50	Tim Johnson	6-0/245	2/7/78	6	Youngstown St.	FA/06	4/0
52	Ray Lewis	6-1/245	5/15/75	12	Miami	D1b/96	14/14
57	Bart Scott	6-2/235	8/18/80	6	Southern Illinois	FA/02	16/16
51	Mike Smith	6-1/240	9/2/81	3	Texas Tech	D7/05	8/1
DEFENSIVE BACKS							
35	Corey Ivy (CB)	5-9/188	3/29/77	7	Oklahoma	FA/06	13/0
26	Dawan Landry (S)	6-0/220	12/30/82	2	Georgia Tech	D5a/06	16/14
29	Derrick Martin (CB)	5-10/202	5/16/85	2	Wyoming	D6b/06	8/0
21	Chris McAlister (CB)	6-1/206	6/14/77	9	Arizona	D1/99	16/16
25	Evan Oglesby (CB)	5-10/185	12/18/81	3	North Alabama	FA/05	16/0
24	David Pittman (CB)	5-11/187	10/14/83	2	Northwestern State	D3/06	0/0
27	Ronnie Prude (CB)	5-11/178	6/4/82	2	Louisiana State	FA/06	15/0
20	Ed Reed (S)	5-11/200	9/11/78	6	Miami	D1/02	16/16
22	Samari Rolle (CB)	6-0/175	8/10/76	10	Florida State	FA/05	16/16
36	B.J. Sams (CB)	5-10/185	10/29/80	4	McNeese State	FA/04	12/0
42	Gerome Sapp (DB)	6-1/216	2/8/81	5	Notre Dame	T-Ind/06	15/1
28	Jamaine Winborne (DB)	5-10/202	12/26/80	3	Virginia	FA/06	1/0
SPECIALISTS							
4	Sam Koch (P)	6-1/230	8/13/82	2	Nebraska	D6a/06	16/0
3	Matt Stover (K)	5-11/178	1/27/68	18	Louisiana Tech	FA/91	16/0

Abbreviations: D1-draft pick, first round; W-claimed on waivers; T-obtained in trade; FA-free-agent acquisition.



# BILLS

**This perpetually rebuilding team hasn't made the playoffs since '99—and the streak won't end this year**

**SN PICK** 3rd, AFC East (5-11)

BY ALLEN WILSON

**D**espite playing the NFL's toughest schedule last season, the young Bills were competitive—they lost five games by three points or fewer. A strong finish and a 7-9 record raised hope that better days were ahead.

But we have seen this movie before. The Bills have lived a roller-coaster existence since 2002, with one season of promise followed by one of disappointment and despair. There is as much uncertainty about 2007 as there was heading into 2006.

## SCHEDULE

All times Eastern

Sept. 9	DENVER	1:00
Sept. 16	at Pittsburgh	1:00
Sept. 23	at New England	1:00
Sept. 30	N.Y. JETS	1:00
Oct. 8	DALLAS*	8:30
Oct. 14	Open date	
Oct. 21	BALTIMORE	1:00
Oct. 28	at N.Y. Jets	4:05
Nov. 4	CINCINNATI	1:00
Nov. 11	at Miami	1:00
Nov. 18	NEW ENGLAND	1:00
Nov. 25	at Jacksonville	1:00
Dec. 2	at Washington	1:00
Dec. 9	MIAMI	1:00
Dec. 16	at Cleveland	1:00
Dec. 23	N.Y. GIANTS	1:00
Dec. 30	at Philadelphia	1:00

Strength of schedule: T-1st

\*Monday

Analysis of every Bills game:  
sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom

## REGULAR-SEASON WINS



There is young talent on the roster. Wide receiver Lee Evans is coming off a breakout season, quarterback J.P. Losman has made strides, and strong safety Donte Whitner headed last season's strong rookie class.

But the Bills lost a huge part of their veteran core in the offseason. Cornerback Nate Clements and middle linebacker London Fletcher-Baker left as free agents, and the club traded running back Willis McGahee and strongside linebacker Takeo Spikes.

## OFFENSE

Coordinator Steve Fairchild worked under Mike Martz in St. Louis and has the same love of the vertical passing game. The Bills use a number of multiple-receiver formations to make opponents defend the entire field. Fairchild is hopeful that better pass protection by the line this season will free the tight ends to attack the seams more often. He also will use



BOB LEVERONE / SN

Losman

## SCOUTING REPORTS: OFFENSE

first-round running back Marshawn Lynch's receiving ability. Fairchild is a big believer in running the ball to control the clock. He doesn't utilize the fullback much, choosing instead to go with two-tight end sets. This unit was woefully inconsistent last season and ranked 30th in total offense.

**Quarterbacks**—As his 10 completions of 40 or more yards last season attest, Losman can make every throw with his tremendously strong right arm. He's a marvelous athlete who avoids the pass rush, makes throws on the move and scrambles for yards. He has made marked improvement in his footwork and technique and is developing into a respected leader.

Still, Losman is a work in progress. He needs to better recognize coverages and not lock on to one receiver. He rushes through his progressions at times and forces throws. He also has to improve on short passes after completing 5-of-24 attempts on third downs requiring 3 yards or less.

Craig Nall should replace Kelly Holcomb—who was traded to the Eagles—as the backup. Unlike Holcomb, Nall, 27, is mobile and has the strong arm needed for the Bills' vertical passing attack. Nall will have competition from rookie Trent Edwards. The team likes Edwards' size (6-3, 222), smarts and arm strength. **GRADE: C+**

**Running backs**—The Bills haven't ranked in the top 16 in rushing since 2002. That could change with the addition of Lynch, a home run hitter with size (5-11, 215), speed and power. Lynch has good vision through the hole, he rarely goes down on first contact, and he's elusive in the open field. He's more versatile than McGahee because he can split outside as a receiver and is good in pass protection.

Lynch will share carries with veteran Anthony Thomas, who was productive when he got significant playing time (he averaged 85 yards in a three-game stretch that included two starts). He's a big back (6-2, 225) who runs with a tough, no-nonsense, downhill style.

Fourth-round pick Dwayne Wright could provide solid depth because of his physical, downhill running style. His presence will push Shaud Williams and Fred Jackson. Williams is undersized (5-7, 193) but has deceptive quickness. Jackson, who



ROBERT SEALE / SN ARCHIVES

### J.P. Losman, QB

**Strengths:** Has good touch and accuracy on short passes. Outstanding speed and extremely quick feet.

**Weaknesses:** Inconsistent. Lacks arm strength; really has to torque his body to get zip on the ball. Panics in the pocket. Holds the ball too long.

**Bottom line:** Losman made strides in 2006, and when he was on, he looked the part of starting QB. When he was off, he looked lost. The lows are not quite as bad as they used to be, but he still has a lot to learn. The Bills seem to be willing to wait for him to sort it all out. **Grade: 6.2**

### \*Marshawn Lynch, RB

**Strengths:** Runs through arm tackles and can absorb hard hits and keep on going. Shows the quickness, agility and burst to bounce runs outside. Defensive backs struggle to tackle him in the open field. Showed toughness while playing through an ankle injury in 2006.

**Weaknesses:** Must improve at lowering his shoulders and running with good pad level to stay durable. Must improve blocking technique. Didn't do

much as a receiver in college; must improve his route-running skills and hands.

**Bottom line:** Lynch, who replaces former first-round pick Willis McGahee, gives Buffalo a nice 1-2 punch with Anthony Thomas.

### ↑Lee Evans, WR

**Strengths:** Tough and aggressive. Hands are very strong. Exceptional at catching the ball on the run. Adjusts well to poorly thrown balls. Will take a big hit and hold on to the ball. Has good top-end speed. Explosive after the catch. A refined route runner for someone with his experience. Excels at finding soft spots in zones. An aggressive blocker.

**Weaknesses:** Has marginal height and merely adequate bulk. Not a red zone threat. Must protect the ball better.

**Bottom line:** Evans is a premier No. 1 receiver and a legitimate deep threat. He is Losman's favorite target and can be a game-breaker when Losman is on. **Grade: 7.8**

### ↑Roscoe Parrish, WR

**Strengths:** Great hands; rarely drops

## FANTASY SOURCE PICKS

**STUD**  
WR Lee Evans ▶

**SLEEPER**  
RB Marshawn Lynch

**STUMBLER**  
QB J.P. Losman

**DRAFT-DAY BARGAIN**  
RB Anthony Thomas

**BYE WEEK FILL-IN**  
TE Robert Royal

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Players are graded by War Room scouts on a 1-10 scale.  
\*Rookies (not graded)

catchable balls. Dynamic after the catch. Can make defenders miss anywhere on the field and has the speed to score from anywhere.

**Weaknesses:** Small. Not good in traffic. Lacks strength and struggles to escape press coverage, especially against big defensive backs.

**Bottom line:** His lack of size and strength will keep him from being a starter, but he can make an impact if used properly. **Grade: 6.0**

#### ↓ Peerless Price, WR

**Strengths:** Adjusts well to passes thrown over his shoulder. Can win jump balls despite his lack of size. Explodes off the line and drives defenders back.

**Weaknesses:** Inconsistent and doesn't always give full effort. Will round off routes at times. Prone to drops. Lacks strength; struggles against press coverage and physical defenders. Doesn't always find soft spots in zones. Not a good blocker.

**Bottom line:** Price averaged only 8.2 yards per catch in his return to Buffalo and no longer is a big-play threat. **Grade: 5.0**

#### Robert Royal, TE

**Strengths:** A relentless blocker. Good at making seal blocks and down blocks. Maintains balance and has nice body control. Has good lateral quickness.

**Weaknesses:** Not much of a receiving threat. Slow, lacks soft and struggles with routes. Not good in a crowd. Lacks strength downfield.

**Bottom line:** Royal is mostly a blocker and excels in this area. He's solid, but he needs to step up as a receiver. **Grade: 6.7**

#### ↑ Jason Peters, T

**Strengths:** An outstanding athlete with very quick feet. Flexible and drives with his legs on run blocks. Has a good punch and lateral slide ability in pass protection. Recovers and redirects well against speed rushers.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks technique and strength. Not a strong run blocker. Can be overpowered at the point of attack. Will miss with his hands in pass protection and can be overpowered and pushed into the pocket.

**Bottom line:** This former tight end has done a good job of making the transition to tackle over the last two seasons and continues to improve.

**Grade: 7.5**

#### Langston Walker, T

**Strengths:** Massive, versatile and athletic. Can block down and collapse the line. Anchors well and drives his feet in short yardage. Very good at picking up stunts.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks strength and has a soft body. Needs to improve his work habits. A better athlete than a player.

**Bottom line:** The Bills plan to start Walker, but he would be a better fit as a versatile backup. He has value as a member of the field goal block unit. **Grade: 6.0**

#### Derrick Dockery, G

**Strengths:** Very powerful at the point of attack. Strong initial punch stuns rushers. Will not be bull-rushed. Moves the pile in the running game and can wash defenders down the line. Engulfs and envelops smaller players.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks speed, quickness and flexibility. Struggles against speed rushers. Not good in space.

**Bottom line:** Dockery needs to improve against fast players to take his game to the next level, but he is a significant upgrade for the Bills' O-line. **Grade: 7.2**

#### ↑ Duke Preston, G

**Strengths:** Very smart. Understands angles. Has quick feet and moves well laterally along the line. Can pull and is very good at the second level.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to greatly improve his lower-body strength.

**Bottom line:** Preston is a good young talent who has stepped in as a starter and also can play center. **Grade: 6.7**

#### Melvin Fowler, C

**Strengths:** A good athlete with solid in-line quickness. Can pull and trap effectively and chip and recover on combination blocks. Smart and has a solid feel for the game.

**Weaknesses:** Has a dumpy frame and can be overpowered. Must improve his technique and is lazy at times.

**Bottom line:** Fowler has the skills to do the job. The addition of Dockery will help him greatly. **Grade: 6.9**

**KEY:** ↑ Ascending ↓ Descending

## INSIDERS POLL

J.P. Losman will be a Pro Bowl quarterback:



Based on a poll of SN's 32 team correspondents

## BOLD PREDICTIONS

**1** New LG Derrick Dockery will team with LT Jason Peters to form one of the best left sides in the NFL. Dockery is the Bills' first legitimate left guard since Ruben Brown.

**2** WR Lee Evans will have another 1,200-yard season, even though he'll be double-teamed more. Coordinator Steve Fairchild will find ways to get his top receiver the ball.

**3** After the loss of CB Nate Clements, the team's league pass defense will fall from seventh to middle of the pack. Shut-down corners are hard to find, and the Bills lost one of the best.

was on the practice squad last year, has added weight and strength but has never played a down.

After deciding not to re-sign Daimon Shelton, the team doesn't have a fullback, and it doesn't plan to sign one. The Bills will use tight end Brad Cieslak as a lead blocker. Cieslak impressed the coaches as a blocker and has made strides as a receiver. **GRADE: B**

**Receivers**—Evans is the ultimate big-play threat. He caught six passes of 40 or more yards in '06 and was one of two receivers (Cincinnati's Chad Johnson was the other) with three touchdown catches of 50 yards or more. Evans is almost impossible to cover one-on-one because of his great speed and ability to get separation on deep routes with slick double moves.

With Evans commanding more double coverage, the team needs the rest of the receiving unit to step up. Peerless Price rejoined the organization that drafted him in 1999, but he averaged a disappointing 8.3 yards on 49 catches. He needs to work harder at getting open and make more plays.

Josh Reed and Roscoe Parrish share the No. 3 spot, and each brings a distinct skill set to the position. Reed is a solid possession receiver from the slot. He has a good understanding of how to find soft spots in short and intermediate zones, is a good runner after the catch and is the best blocker in the unit. The team needs to get the ball to the 5-9, 170-pound Parrish more because he's a threat to score from anywhere on the field with his blazing speed. He also is fearless going over the middle.

TE Robert Royal was a good addition last season because of his strong blocking, and he surprised the coaches with his ability to get downfield and make plays. Cieslak heads into the

season as the backup here. This is a make-or-break season for third-year pro Kevin Everett, an outstanding athlete who has struggled to learn Fairchild's offense. **GRADE: B**

**Line**—The unit lacked talent and toughness last season, but the team is hopeful guard Derrick Dockery (6-6, 335) and right tackle Langston Walker (6-8, 345)—a pair of free-agent acquisitions—will change that. They are massive blockers who can engulf defenders in the running game. Walker has to improve his footwork in pass protection and overcome questions about his work ethic.

Left tackle Jason Peters is a rising star—and he and Dockery will form a strong left side. Peters (6-4, 328), a former tight end, is a remarkable athlete with good footwork and lateral mobility. He also can dominate as a run blocker.

Duke Preston started the second half of 2006 at right guard and has the inside track on that job, but he needs to keep improving his technique and strength to solidify his place in the lineup. Center Melvin Fowler is smart, has a nice feel for the game and is very athletic. But he's a little undersized (6-3, 305) and can be overpowered by big tackles.

Terrance Pennington, who started the last nine games at right tackle last season, provides insurance off the bench. Free-agent signee Jason Whittle and second-year player Aaron Merz can play center or guard. Brad Butler, who didn't play as a rookie last season, has been moved from tackle to guard and will get a long look this summer. **GRADE: C**

## DEFENSE

The Bills have a smallish front seven that relies on speed instead of size. That's fine as long as the four down linemen can occupy blockers enough so the linebackers can attack the line of scrimmage and disrupt the running game. Coordinator Perry Fewell played a lot of cover 2 last season, with both safeties deep to prevent big plays. Look for more of the same because the team doesn't have a true lockdown cornerback now that Clements is gone.

**Line**—Right end Aaron Schobel became a Pro Bowl player last season and recorded a career-high 14 sacks. He has an explosive first step, and he goes hard every play. Chris Kelsay and Ryan Denney are a nice combination on the left side; both are tough, aggressive and relentless in pursuit. Anthony

## SECRET WEAPON

### ROBERT ROYAL, TE

Royal set career highs last season with 23 catches and 233 receiving yards, but he wasn't used as a pass catcher that much because he was needed to help in pass protection. The Bills' line is expected to be better this year, so Royal will have more opportunities to make a bigger impact in the passing game.

BOB LEVERONE / SN

## SCOUTING REPORTS: DEFENSE

### ↑ Aaron Schobel, E

**Strengths:** Has an elite motor and excellent stamina and conditioning. Has outstanding awareness and is quick and powerful. Has great upper-body strength. Takes good angles and has rare closing burst. A powerful tackler who generates fumbles. Very good change-of-direction skills. Extremely effective on stunts.

**Weaknesses:** Has trouble holding up at the point of attack when teams run at him. Lacks ideal lower-body strength. Struggles to hold his ground against bigger offensive tackles.

**Bottom line:** Schobel was the biggest beneficiary of Dick Jauron's move to an attacking 4-3 scheme in 2006 and made the Pro Bowl. With his strong work ethic and passion for the game, look for him to make more trips to Hawaii. **Grade: 8.0**

### ↑ Chris Kelsay, E

**Strengths:** At his best when he can play wide and keep moving. Has good quickness and anticipation and a high motor. Uses his upper body to stay off blocks. Has good agility and recognizes well. Finds the ball quickly.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks speed and burst. Must improve lower-body strength. Doesn't make enough big plays. Must improve tackling technique.

**Bottom line:** Kelsay is a viable starter who has enough speed and pass-rush ability to shine in the Bills' scheme. **Grade: 6.9**

### \*Paul Posluszny, LB

**Strengths:** Reads plays and reacts quickly. Fills holes aggressively. Quick enough to chase down running plays and shows an explosive closing burst. Drops into coverage fluidly. A great tackler.

**Weaknesses:** Not an aggressive blitzing. Can get tied up by blockers and sometimes has trouble moving through traffic.

**Bottom line:** Posluszny, who is projected to start in the middle, is similar to Green Bay's A.J. Hawk in terms of instincts and pursuit but isn't as big or strong.

### ↓ Larry Tripplett, T

**Strengths:** Has a high motor, very active hands and feet and good balance. Can redirect quickly to make a plays.

**Weaknesses:** Not strong; can't hold up inside. Can get bounced around and be pancaked.

**Bottom line:** Tripplett emerged as a solid starter for the Bills in 2006. His quickness and athleticism play well in Buffalo's scheme. **Grade: 6.6**

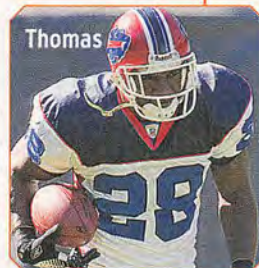


JAY DROWNS / SN

# SCOUT TAKES

## A scout from another team sizes up the Bills

**Anthony Thomas** will be a good between-the-tackles complement to newly drafted **Marshawn Lynch**. Thomas can provide a physical running style, and Lynch can be the more elusive big-play threat. ... The reason **Lee Evans** is successful is because he's fast. I know that sounds elementary—all receiver are supposed to be fast—but he's *real* fast. ... They'll miss **London Fletcher-Baker**. He's such a dynamo and an emotional leader, and he was so durable and reliable for them. He's a playmaker who shows up all over the field. ... **Angelo Crowell** is a very tough guy. He's a solid line-backer who's bigger than Fletcher-Baker and is going to add size and mass. But you've got to believe there will be a little bit of a drop-off from a polished standpoint. London was always in the right place.



JAY DROWNS / SN



JAY DROWNS / SN

Hargrove, a midseason acquisition last year, is a high-energy player who will get more playing time in '07.

Because the Bills lack size inside, they struggle to stop power runs. They hope a deeper rotation will remedy the problem. Larry Tripplett was the best of the group last season; he is a prototype 3 technique tackle who uses good quickness and hands to shed blocks.

Darwin Walker, who was acquired from the Eagles for Spikes and Holcomb, figures to have a major role. Though not a great run stuffer, he excelled in Philadelphia as an interior pass rusher. Look for the Bills to line up Walker and Tripplett side by side on third down to bring pressure up the middle.

The team still needs a tackle who can hold his ground over the center. Kyle Williams is an active player with a knack for getting penetration and pursuing the ballcarrier. A starter most of last year, he probably is a better fit as a backup.

John McCargo, last year's first-round pick, is a player to watch. A foot injury limited him to five games, but he could be a force if he gets stronger at the point of attack. He has the quickness to collapse the pocket. Tim Anderson will have a tough time cracking the rotation. **GRADE: B-**

**Linebackers**—The position is weaker without Fletcher-Baker and Spikes. Fletcher-Baker led the team in tackles five consecutive seasons, and Spikes was a great locker room leader.

### ↑ Kyle Williams, T

**Strengths:** Plays to the whistle. Has good leg drive and hand position. Plays with leverage and moves well laterally.

**Weaknesses:** Not a great natural athlete. Must get stronger. Struggles to penetrate against bigger opponents. Short arms make it difficult to separate from taller blockers.

**Bottom line:** Williams lacks ideal physical tools, but he is an excellent fit in the Bills' one-gap scheme. He will make the most of his skills. **Grade: 6.5**

### Angelo Crowell, LB

**Strengths:** Has good speed and lateral movement. Plays best in space. Has a good motor and is an excellent tackler. Shows decent power at the point of attack and good range in zone coverage.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to improve awareness of cut blocks. Blitzes in too straight of a line.

**Bottom line:** Crowell is healthy after missing the final four games last season with a leg injury. He's slated to move from the weak side to replace London Fletcher-Baker in the middle. Crowell is too good a player not to be on the field. **Grade: 6.8**

### Keith Ellison, LB

**Strengths:** An outstanding athlete who has good speed and quickness and a nonstop motor. Makes plays sideline to sideline. Matches up well in man coverage against backs and tight ends. Has good range in zone coverage and solid ball skills.

**Weaknesses:** Must add bulk and lower-body strength. Struggles against bigger blockers. Undisciplined and lacks recognition skills.

**Bottom line:** Ellison, a former strong safety, is raw but immensely talented. He will improve exponentially with better decision making. **Grade: 6.5**

### Terrence McGee, CB

**Strengths:** Has good quickness and a second gear when he turns and runs. Shows very good body control, fluid hips and smooth change-of-direction skills. Best in intermediate zone coverage. Will mix it up in run support.

Has tremendous vision, patience and awareness on kick returns.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks size and strength. Doesn't play aggressively or with confidence. Gives a lot of cushion and allows too many catches in front of him. Can be overpowered by taller, stronger receivers. Has below-average recognition skills and only decent ball skills.

**Bottom line:** McGee is a great return man who has grown as a starting corner. **Grade: 7.7**

### ↑ Ashton Youboty, CB

**Strengths:** A natural athlete with good straight-line speed. Has smooth hip movement and changes direction well. Shows burst in and out of breaks. Has good instincts and intelligence. Relentless and intense.

**Weaknesses:** Must get stronger. Struggles in the run game and lacks recognition skills. Takes too many chances in coverage.

**Bottom line:** Some expected Youboty to step in as a starter as a rookie, but the death of his mother last August delayed the start of his career. He has the skills to replace Nate Clements as a starter. **Grade: 7.0**

### ↑ Donte Whitner, S

**Strengths:** Makes plays all over the field. Excels in the box against the run. A sure tackler who can blitz off the corner. Can make plays in the open field and can play on the perimeter in man coverage. Has excellent hands and ball skills and a high motor.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks great recognition skills. Reacts slowly to play-action fakes and can get pushed out of plays.

**Bottom line:** Whitner has the versatility to play any position in the secondary. His strong cover skills add flexibility to the Bills' pass defense. He's a future star. **Grade: 7.9**

### ↑ Ko Simpson, S

**Strengths:** Has good strength and speed and outstanding ball skills. Shows great instincts in pass defense. Physical in coverage and can box out larger receivers. Has good recovery speed and makes open-field tackles. Willing in run support.

**Weaknesses:** Relies too much on athletic ability. Must improve his technique and recognition skills.

**Bottom line:** Look for Simpson to be a key component in Buffalo's defense for the foreseeable future. **Grade: 7.1**



The team hopes second-round pick Paul Posluszny will soften the blow. Posluszny is ideal for the Bills' scheme because he's quick, athletic and smart. He attacks the line of scrimmage as a run stuffer, and he has the range to make plays all over the field. Posluszny's coverage skills will be tested—the Bills require the middle backer to drop into the deep middle in their cover 2.

With Posluszny on board, Angelo Crowell, last year's weak-side backer, will replace Spikes on the strong side. He had been expected to take over for Fletcher-Baker in the middle. Crowell is better suited to playing outside where he can better use his quickness and athleticism.

Keith Ellison will replace Crowell on the weak side. Ellison is quick and athletic with enough range to play in pass coverage. He needs more bulk and strength to effectively take on blockers at the point of attack.

Coy Wire made a smooth transition from safety to line-backer last season. He's undersized (6-0, 220) but is strong, physical and tough. Josh Stamer and Mario Haggan are career backups with good size and enough athletic ability to play in space. Stamer is coming back from a knee injury. Backup middle linebacker John DiGiorgio is a developmental prospect.

**GRADE: C-**

**Secondary**—The Bills hated losing Clements, but they weren't going to give him the massive salary he got from the 49ers. Clements' ability to take away an opponent's best receiver will be sorely missed. Terrence McGee takes over as the No. 1 corner. He doesn't take a lot of chances, but he will compete when the ball is in the air. He got burned on double moves in '06 but played better the second half of the season. He also is not afraid to attack the run.

The X-factor at corner is Ashton Youboty, a third-round pick last year who played in only three games. Youboty is a good athlete who can play different coverages but needs more strength and must work on technique. The team thinks Youboty has more upside than Kiwaukee Thomas—they believe Youboty's cover skills will develop with more experience—and are hoping he emerges as the starter opposite McGee. Thomas stood out as the nickel corner last year by showing good quickness and recognition skills. He also displayed good instincts as a blitzer.

Jabari Greer, a key reserve, has good agility and is comfortable in zone coverage.

Safeties Donte Whitner and Ko Simpson both started as rookies last season. Whitner is a physical tackler in run support, though he tends to be overaggressive. He has the

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speed to cover receivers in the slot and reacts well when the ball is in the air. Simpson was a fourth-round steal. He plays well in deep coverage, has excellent ball skills and is a solid tackler. Backup Jim Leonhard lacks height (5-8) but plays bigger than his size. Rookie John Wendling's college production didn't match his athleticism, but he is a physical player and has upside because of his outstanding size (6-1, 222), speed and intelligence. **GRADE: C**

## SPECIAL TEAMS

Under coach Bobby April, the Bills have had arguably the best special teams in the NFL the past three seasons. Pro Bowl punter Brian Moorman generates tremendous power, gets great

hang time and is very accurate on directional kicks. Rian Lindell is the most accurate kicker in team history. He was 23-of-25 on field-goal attempts last season and has made all 224 extra-point tries in his career. Long snapper Mike Schneck is technically sound and rarely makes a mistake.

McGee again was one of the premier kick returners and finished sixth with a 26.1-yard average. He sets up his blocks, finds daylight well and is decisive at hitting holes. Parrish was third in the league in punt returns with an 11.4-yard average. He is very elusive in the open field and has tremendous acceleration.

The coverage units are always sound under April. Haggan, Greer, Wire and Sam Aiken are among the top performers in coverage because they stay in their lanes, shed blocks well and are solid tacklers.

**GRADE: A**

## BOTTOM LINE

The Bills have failed to make the playoffs seven straight years, and it will be difficult for them to end that streak in 2007. If Losman continues to improve, Lynch is the real deal and the line gets better, the offense could be explosive. At the least, it will need to be more productive to take pressure off a defense that has gotten younger but not necessarily better. The team has some building blocks for the future, but the young players need more time to mature. This looks like a team that will be no better than 8-8. **SN**

*Allen Wilson covers the Bills for the Buffalo News.*

# KEY MOVES

## 2007 DRAFT PICKS

Rd.-Pick

**GRADE B+**

**1-12 Marshawn Lynch, RB, California**

Expected to share carries with Anthony Thomas.

**2-34 Paul Posluszny, LB, Penn State**

Instinctive and competitive. A candidate in the middle and outside.

**3-92 Trent Edwards, QB, Stanford**

Excellent size and arm strength. Will push backup Craig Nall.

**4-111 Dwayne Wright, RB, Fresno State**

Could develop into a solid short-yardage back.

**6-184 John Wendling, S, Wyoming**

Athletic. Needs work on technique, cover skills. Adds depth.

**7-222 Derek Schouman, TE, Boise State**

Sure-handed receiver. An H-back if he makes the team.

**7-239 C.J. Ah You, DE, Oklahoma**

Inconsistent effort. Not very stout against the run. A long shot.

## VETERAN PLAYERS

**Additions:** G Derrick Dockery (FA/Redskins), DT Darwin Walker (trade/Eagles), OT Langston Walker (FA/Raiders), C/G Jason Whittle (FA/Vikings).

**Losses:** S Matt Bowen (FA), CB Nate Clements (FA/49ers), WR Andre' Davis (FA/Texans), LB London Fletcher-Baker (FA/Redskins), G Mike Gandy (FA/Cardinals), QB Kelly Holcomb (trade/Eagles), RB Willis McGahee (trade/Ravens), G Tutan Reyes (FA), FB Daimon Shelton (FA), LB Takeo Spikes (trade/Eagles), G Chris Villalria (FA).





Price

## PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
QB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● J.P. Losman</li> <li>● Craig Nall</li> </ul>	LE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Chris Kelsay</li> <li>● Ryan Denney</li> </ul>
FB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Brad Cieslak</li> <li>● Ryan Neufeld</li> </ul>	DT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Larry Tripplett</li> <li>● Darwin Walker</li> </ul>
RB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Marshawn Lynch</li> <li>● Anthony Thomas</li> </ul>	DT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Kyle Williams</li> <li>● John McCargo</li> </ul>
WR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ Lee Evans</li> <li>● Roscoe Parrish</li> </ul>	RE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ Aaron Schobel</li> <li>● Anthony Hargrove</li> </ul>
WR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Peerless Price</li> <li>● Josh Reed</li> </ul>	SLB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Angelo Crowell</li> <li>● Mario Haggan</li> </ul>
TE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Robert Royal</li> <li>● Brad Cieslak</li> </ul>	MLB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Paul Posluszny</li> <li>□ John DiGiorgio</li> </ul>
LT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Jason Peters</li> <li>● Terrance Pennington</li> </ul>	WLB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Keith Ellison</li> <li>● Coy Wire</li> </ul>
LG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Derrick Dockery</li> <li>● Jason Whittle</li> </ul>	LCB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Terrence McGee</li> <li>● Jabari Greer</li> </ul>
C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Melvin Fowler</li> <li>□ Aaron Merz</li> </ul>	SS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Donte Whitner</li> <li>● Coy Wire</li> </ul>
RG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Duke Preston</li> <li>● Jason Whittle</li> </ul>	FS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ko Simpson</li> <li>● Jim Leonhard</li> </ul>
RT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Langston Walker</li> <li>● Terrance Pennington</li> </ul>	RCB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ashton Youtby</li> <li>● Kiwaukee Thomas</li> </ul>
SPECIALISTS			
K	● Rian Lindell	KR	▲ Terrence McGee
P	▲ Brian Moorman	PR	▲ Roscoe Parrish
		LS	▲ Mike Schneck
	▲ Elite ■ Solid ● Adequate □ Fringe		

Depth charts updated weekly at [sportingnews.com](http://sportingnews.com)



Posluszny

## BILLS ROSTER

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL exp.	College	How acq.	2006 GP/GS
QUARTERBACKS							
5	Trent Edwards	6-4/231	10/30/83	R	Stanford	D3/07	—
7	J.P. Losman	6-2/217	3/12/81	4	Tulane	D1b/04	16/16
16	Craig Nall	6-3/228	4/21/79	6	Northwestern St.	FA/06	0/0
RUNNING BACKS							
86	Brad Cieslak (TE)	6-3/252	7/1/82	3	Northern Illinois	FA/05	7/2
45	Fred Jackson	6-1/208	2/20/81	1	Coe College	FA/06	0/0
23	Marshawn Lynch	5-11/215	4/22/86	R	California	D1/07	—
33	Josh Scobey	6-0/216	12/11/79	5	Kansas State	FA/07	12/0
28	Anthony Thomas	6-2/225	11/7/77	7	Michigan	FA/06	16/2
36	Shaud Williams	5-7/193	10/2/80	4	Alabama	FA/04	5/0
31	Dwayne Wright	5-11/228	6/2/83	R	Fresno State	FA/07	—
RECEIVERS							
89	Sam Aiken	6-2/204	12/14/80	5	North Carolina	D4b/03	15/0
83	Lee Evans	5-10/197	3/11/81	4	Wisconsin	D1a/04	16/15
85	Kevin Everett (TE)	6-4/241	2/5/82	3	Miami	D3/05	16/4
87	Matt Murphy (TE)	6-5/260	2/23/80	6	Maryland	FA/06	2/0
88	Ryan Neufeld (TE)	6-4/250	11/22/75	7	UCLA	FA/03	9/0
11	Roscoe Parrish	5-9/170	7/16/82	3	Miami	D2/05	16/1
81	Peerless Price	5-11/190	10/27/76	9	Tennessee	FA/06	16/15
82	Josh Reed	5-10/208	5/1/80	6	LSU	D2a/02	13/1
84	Robert Royal (TE)	6-4/257	5/15/79	5	LSU	FA/06	16/15
80	Derek Schouman (TE)	6-2/233	3/11/85	R	Boise State	D7a/07	—
15	George Wilson	6-0/205	3/14/81	3	Arkansas	FA/06	0/0
OFFENSIVE LINEMEN							
60	Brad Butler (T)	6-8/292	9/18/83	2	Virginia	D5b/06	2/0
73	Kirk Chambers (G)	6-7/314	3/19/79	3	Stanford	FA/07	0/0
66	Derrick Dockery (G)	6-6/335	9/7/80	6	Texas	FA/07	16/16
67	Melvin Fowler (C/G)	6-3/305	3/31/79	6	Maryland	FA/06	16/16
74	Randy Hand (T)	6-6/310	1/10/84	1	Florida	FA/06	0/0
62	Aaron Merz (C/G)	6-4/340	8/27/83	2	California	D7b/06	7/1
79	Terrance Pennington (T)	6-7/319	9/25/83	2	New Mexico	D7a/06	11/9
71	Jason Peters (T)	6-4/328	1/22/82	4	Arkansas	FA/04	16/16
75	Duke Preston (G/C)	6-5/311	6/12/82	3	Illinois	D4/05	16/8
54	Mike Schneck (LS)	6-0/246	8/4/77	9	Wisconsin	FA/05	16/0
70	Walter Stith	6-9/320	1/2/83	1	North Carolina	FA/06	0/0
68	Langston Walker (T)	6-8/345	9/3/79	7	California	FA/07	16/16
65	Jason Whittle (C/G)	6-4/305	3/7/75	10	Missouri State	FA/07	16/2
DEFENSIVE LINEMEN							
76	C.J. Ah You (E)	6-4/275	7/7/82	R	Oklahoma	D7b/07	—
77	Tim Anderson (T)	6-3/304	11/22/80	4	Ohio State	D3/04	15/5
92	Ryan Denney (E)	6-7/275	6/15/77	6	BYU	D2b/02	16/0
93	Anthony Hargrove (E)	6-3/272	7/20/83	4	Georgia Tech	T-SU/06	14/2
99	Jason Jefferson (T)	6-1/295	12/20/81	3	Wisconsin	FA/05	4/0
90	Chris Kelsay (E)	6-4/275	10/31/79	5	Nebraska	D2/03	16/16
97	John McCargo (T)	6-2/295	8/19/83	2	N.C. State	D1b/06	5/0
72	Ryan Neill (E)	6-3/250	12/12/82	1	Rutgers	FA/06	0/0
91	Eric Powell (E)	6-3/268	11/16/79	2	Florida State	FA/06	0/0
94	Aaron Schobel (E)	6-4/262	9/1/77	7	TCU	D2a/01	16/16
98	Larry Tripplett (T)	6-2/295	1/18/79	6	Washington	FA/06	16/16
96	Darwin Walker (T)	6-3/294	6/15/77	8	Tennessee	T-Phi/07	16/15
95	Kyle Williams (T)	6-1/297	6/10/83	2	LSU	D5a/06	16/11
LINEBACKERS							
55	Angelo Crowell	6-1/235	8/16/81	5	Virginia	D3/03	12/12
52	John DiGiorgio	6-2/225	6/29/83	2	Saginaw Valley	FA/06	12/0
56	Keith Ellison	6-0/228	2/6/84	2	Oregon State	D6/06	14/8
53	Mario Haggan	6-3/248	3/3/80	5	Mississippi State	D7/03	16/0
50	Kevin Harrison	6-0/256	12/24/81	1	Eastern Michigan	FA/06	0/0
96	Roy Manning	6-2/245	12/4/81	3	Michigan	FA/06	1/0
51	Paul Posluszny	6-1/238	10/10/84	R	Penn State	D2/07	—
57	Josh Stamer	6-2/238	10/11/77	5	South Dakota	FA/03	6/0
27	Coy Wire (S)	6-0/220	11/7/78	6	Stanford	D3/02	16/1
DEFENSIVE BACKS							
43	Eric Bassey (CB)	6-1/200	1/23/83	1	Oklahoma	FA/06	0/0
33	Jabari Greer (CB)	5-11/169	2/2/82	4	Tennessee	FA/04	16/0
42	Jim Leonhard (S)	5-8/190	10/27/82	3	Wisconsin	FA/05	15/1
24	Terrence McGee (CB)	5-9/195	10/14/80	5	Northwestern State	D4a/03	15/14
40	Ko Simpson (S)	6-1/201	11/9/83	2	South Carolina	D4/06	16/15
37	Kiwaukee Thomas (CB)	5-11/192	6/19/77	8	Georgia Southern	FA/06	16/2
29	John Wendling (S)	6-1/222	6/4/83	R	Wyoming	D6/07	—
20	Donte Whitner (S)	5-11/205	7/24/85	2	Ohio State	D1a/06	15/14
26	Ashton Youtby (CB)	5-11/189	7/7/84	2	Ohio State	D3/06	3/1
SPECIALISTS							
9	Rian Lindell (K)	6-3/235	1/20/77	8	Washington State	FA/03	16/0
8	Brian Moorman (P)	6-0/175	2/5/76	7	Pittsburg State	FA/01	16/0

Abbreviations: D1-draft pick, first round; W-claimed on waivers; T-obtained in trade; FA-free-agent acquisition.



CINCINNATI

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# BENGALS

If the firepower on offense can make up for the shortcomings on defense, the Bengals have a shot

**SN PICK** 1st, AFC North (10-6)

By **CHICK LUDWIG**

»»» **T**his season represents a window of opportunity for the Bengals. If the defense improves—and it is expected to—2007 could erase the bitter memories of 2006, when just one victory during an 0-3 closing collapse would have landed the team in the postseason.

The franchise also will be trying to get past its off-field troubles—the Bengals had nine players arrested in a nine-month period through January—and the on-field operation would be helped immeasurably by a distraction-free season.

One thing is clear: The Bengals have the offensive firepower to get to the playoffs.

## OFFENSE

The offense is explosive, dangerous and balanced, and it's built around quarterback Carson Palmer and a plethora of talented skill-position players. Coordinator Bob Bratkowski has a unit capable of striking through the air or grinding out first downs with a power running game that uses two-tight end sets and spread formations. The unit is deep and versatile, which will allow it to exploit opponents in a variety of ways as the team uses more no-huddle looks.

**Quarterbacks**—In 2006, Palmer threw for more than 4,000 yards, and he did it on one good leg. The team has high hopes for what he'll accomplish now that he's a full season removed from major surgery on his left knee. He spent the offseason strengthening his shoulder and working on his lower-body strength so he can be a more effective thrower when he rolls out or gets flushed from the pocket.

Palmer sometimes gets overaggressive, and that can lead to trouble. Instead of going for the jugular with the lead, he needs to be patient, spread the ball around and shorten the game with clock-killing drives.

Veteran backup Doug Johnson is well-suited for the offense. He's athletic enough to escape the pocket when necessary and throws with good velocity. But he needs to improve his ability to beat the blitz, read coverages and make decisions.

## SCHEDULE

All times Eastern

Sept. 10	BALTIMORE*	7:00
Sept. 16	at Cleveland	1:00
Sept. 23	at Seattle	4:05
Oct. 1	NEW ENGLAND*	8:30
Oct. 7	Open date	
Oct. 14	at Kansas City	1:00
Oct. 21	N.Y. JETS	4:05
Oct. 28	PITTSBURGH	1:00
Nov. 4	at Buffalo	1:00
Nov. 11	at Baltimore	4:05
Nov. 18	ARIZONA	1:00
Nov. 25	TENNESSEE	1:00
Dec. 2	at Pittsburgh	8:15
Dec. 9	ST. LOUIS	1:00
Dec. 15	at San Francisco††	8:15
Dec. 23	CLEVELAND	1:00
Dec. 30	at Miami	1:00

Strength of schedule: T-8th

\*Monday ††Saturday

Analysis of every Bengals game:  
[sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom](http://sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom)

## REGULAR-SEASON WINS



Palmer



MATTHEW KUTZ / SN ARCHIVES

Fifth-round pick Jeff Rowe will be groomed for the No. 3 role. He has size, accuracy and toughness but must quicken his motion, improve his speed and increase the velocity of his throws. **GRADE: A-**

**Running backs**—Rudi Johnson is a workhorse who is built to take a pounding. A more disciplined diet and flexibility training have allowed Johnson to improve his quickness and speed and maintain his power. With him, the Bengals are able to move the chains and produce in the running game. Johnson's biggest weakness is his lack of breakaway speed; his longest run in 2006 was 22 yards.

Backup Chris Perry, an elusive runner, won't be ready for the start of the season because he's rehabbing a broken ankle, and, after a series of injuries, his status is in question. That's why the club drafted Kenny Irons in the second round and re-signed Kenny Watson, who is a tough inside runner and a solid check-down receiver. Irons is a quick, dynamic back with the ability to break long runs. He's a hard-charging slasher who makes defenders miss with sharp cuts inside and out, and he's an explosive downfield threat.

Jeremi Johnson is a prototypical fullback who delivers crushing blocks. He's more than capable of producing as a short-yardage specialist because of his ability to hit the hole quickly with great force. **GRADE: B**

**Receivers**—The Bengals have one of the best receiving units in the league. Chad Johnson and T.J. Houshmandzadeh combined for almost 2,500 yards last season, and they complement each other well. Johnson is a blazing deep threat on the outside, and Houshmandzadeh is a smooth, precise route runner who has deceptive speed and excellent hands.

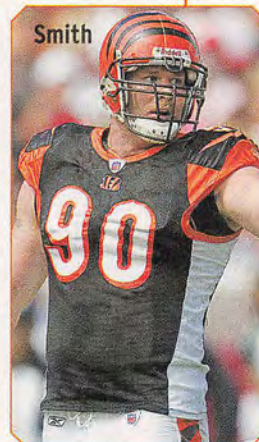
The big question for the receiving unit: With Chris Henry out the first eight games because of a suspension, who will be the No. 3 guy? Henry is an explosive player who brings speed

## SCOUT TAKES

### A scout from another team sizes up the Bengals

I think they'll be better this year. They are a dangerous team that can strike and put up points. ... **Carson Palmer** has everything you want in a quarterback. He's smart, accurate and tough and has a rocket for an arm. ... **Justin Smith** is a solid player, but I don't think he's in that elite class of defensive ends. He gives you the combination of pass-run skill, but he's not a superior pass rusher and he's not a dominant run player. ... **Rudi Johnson** is a banger. He runs for tough yards and breaks tackles. He doesn't have that home run ability, but the first guy rarely tackles him. ... **Jonathan Joseph**, their first-round pick last year, certainly proved his worth. And they added some secondary depth in this year's draft. ... **Eric Ghiaciuc** got a lot of playing time last year (at center), so that will certainly help him going into this year.

BOB LEVERONE / SN





and excitement to the lineup. The team will have to lean on Tab Perry and Antonio Chatman to fill the void. Perry is a big target with good hands and moves, but he lacks Henry's speed. Chatman is an ideal slot receiver because his quickness creates mismatches with linebackers and safeties over the middle.

Tight end Reggie Kelly is an outstanding blocker and underrated pass catcher. He won't stretch defenses, but he'll give Palmer solid protection, and he's a big target who can get first downs on short and intermediate routes. The club has high hopes for the practice squad trio of Ronnie Ghent, Tim Day and Gregg Guenther. They'll need to learn quickly or the offense could be in trouble if Kelly gets injured. **GRADE: A**

**Line**—The cohesion that had been the hallmark of this big, physical unit was disrupted by the retirement of center Rich Braham and the free-agent departure of left guard Eric Steinbach. But left tackle Levi Jones and Pro Bowl right tackle Willie Anderson still are around.

Bobbie Williams, a punishing run blocker, is the starter at right guard. Big, versatile lineman Andrew Whitworth will step in at left guard. At center, Eric Ghiaciuc is expected to beat out Ben Wilkerson and free-agent addition Alex Stepanovich for the starting job. Ghiaciuc uses his hands well off the snap, shows good lateral quickness and gets good leverage by keeping his pad level low. He needs to improve at reaching the second level.

The tackles are the strength of this unit. Jones is a big, quick athlete, and he protects Palmer's blind side. Anderson is a shut-down pass protector and road-grading run blocker. He has good chemistry with Williams on the right side.

Guard Stacy Andrews and tackle Scott Kooistra join Stepanovich as the top backups. Andrews is a monster who has the versatility to start at both guard spots and fill in at tackle, and the physical Kooistra is best suited for the right side, where he can show off his rugged run-blocking skills. **GRADE: B**

## DEFENSE

Coach Marvin Lewis came to Cincinnati in 2003 with the reputation as a defensive guru. But after four years of struggling as a league bottom-feeder—the unit ranked 28th, 19th, 28th

## SCOUTING REPORTS: OFFENSE

### ↑ Carson Palmer, QB

**Strengths:** Can make all the throws. Has outstanding size but is light on his feet. Has a very quick release. Can thread the ball into coverage or hit the deep out. His accuracy continues to improve. Adequate runner who can move the chains with his feet.

**Weaknesses:** Will put too much velocity on his passes at times. Sometimes forces the issue; tends to press late in games.

**Bottom line:** With his great physical tools and the excellent weapons at his disposal in an attacking offense, Palmer is the heir apparent to Peyton Manning and Tom Brady as the best quarterback in the NFL. **Grade: 9.5**

### Rudi Johnson, RB

**Strengths:** Has a compact running style and a powerful lower body. Has good vision and hits the hole with force. Has quick feet and runs with good balance and pad level.

**Weaknesses:** Not a stop/start runner. Speed is just average. Not real elusive in space. Would rather run over the defender than around him.

**Bottom line:** Johnson is a powerful between-the-tackles runner. He isn't a true game-breaker, but he is a very good back who helps the offense stay balanced.

**Grade: 8.0**

### Jeremi Johnson, FB

**Strengths:** Possesses an excellent combination of size, strength and athletic ability. A powerful lead blocker. Works to get to the middle linebacker and finish blocks. Plays with a mean streak. Has very good hands.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to improve his study habits. A liability in pass protection and blitz pickup.

**Bottom line:** Johnson continues to get better, and his toughness rubs off on his teammates.

**Grade: 7.2**

### ↑ Chad Johnson, WR

**Strengths:** Possesses a rare combination of size, strength and athletic ability. Has deceptive speed and tremendous agility and body control. Physical. Has excellent hands.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to improve his concentration and attitude when things go wrong. Doesn't give great effort when he is not the first option. Needs to improve his route running against zone coverage.

**Bottom line:** Johnson is very durable and consistent. Year in and year out, he's among the top five receivers in the league. **Grade: 9.4**

## FANTASY SOURCE PICKS

### STUD

QB Carson Palmer

### MR. RELIABLE

RB Rudi Johnson

### BEST RED ZONE THREAT

WR T.J. Houshmandzadeh

### DRAFT-DAY BARGAIN

K Shayne Graham

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Players are graded by War Room scouts on a 1-10 scale.  
\*Rookies (not graded)

### ↑ T.J. Houshmandzadeh, WR

**Strengths:** Very strong and uses his hands well. Has quick hands and feet. Will make tough catches over the middle. Has very good concentration. Can be a red zone threat with his size and ability to shield defenders.

**Weaknesses:** Does not have the ability to separate. Never will be a home run threat. Doesn't have a natural feel for coverages and open spots. Must improve his knowledge of the game.

**Bottom line:** Houshmandzadeh is a very good possession receiver, and he has continued to emerge as a top starter. He is a very good complement to Chad Johnson. **Grade: 8.4**

### Reggie Kelly, TE

**Strengths:** Has good size. Plays with intensity and aggressiveness as a run blocker. Shows good quickness off the snap and good initial punch. Has good hands.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks the quickness and speed to get separation in the intermediate passing game. Not a threat after the catch.

**Bottom line:** Kelly probably is best-suited to a backup role. He's a better blocker than receiver. **Grade: 6.8**

### ↓ Willie Anderson, T

**Strengths:** A tough player with outstanding durability. Has excellent stamina and possesses an excellent combination of size and strength for the position. Can engulf opponents at the point of attack. Excels as a run blocker.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to improve his hand placement. Can get lazy with his feet and get beaten to the edge. Sometimes has trouble with quicker ends in pass protection.

**Bottom line:** Anderson is one of the better right tackles in the game. He's aging but is tough and competitive. **Grade: 8.5**

### ↑ Levi Jones, T

**Strengths:** An excellent athlete. Plays with good toughness and is a strong competitor. Has very good quickness as both a run and pass blocker. Able to recover when beat-

en. Has solid strength.

**Weaknesses:** Has some mental lapses in pass protection. Overextends at times on run blocks. Needs to use his hands more consistently.

**Bottom line:** Jones is starting to come into his own and is on the brink of breaking into the Pro Bowl lineup. He has the athleticism to compete with most of the NFL's top edge rushers.

**Grade: 8.4**

### ↑ Andrew Whitworth, G

**Strengths:** Experienced and coachable. Big and tall with a thick frame and muscular arms. Plays with a mean streak. Takes good angles on run blocks and gets to the point of attack quickly. Explodes upon collision and moves piles. Finishes blocks.

**Weaknesses:** Must improve his footwork. Lacks agility and has difficulty moving laterally. Struggles to recover against quicker pass rushers. Sometimes has trouble hitting moving targets.

**Bottom line:** Whitworth is a mauler, and even though he's not an exceptional athlete, he plays hard and smart on every play. **Grade: 7.6**

### ↑ Bobbie Williams, G

**Strengths:** Not pretty but is effective. Flashes a mean streak. Finishes blocks when locked on in the running game. Has very good initial punch to stun defenders. Shows the ability to anchor in pass protection.

**Weaknesses:** Struggles with sudden movements by tackles and can be slow off the ball. Needs to improve balance and recover ability. Tends to get sloppy with his technique.

**Bottom line:** Williams is a durable and fiery competitor. He will be a starter for the foreseeable future. **Grade: 7.1**

### Eric Ghiaciuc, C

**Strengths:** Works his hands well off the snap and is good with leverage. Plays with good lateral quickness. Plays under control and takes good angles.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to improve his strength and speed in the open field. **Bottom line:** Ghiaciuc has paid his dues and now will get the opportunity to be the starter for the Bengals.

**Grade: 6.0**

**KEY:** ↑ Ascending ↓ Descending

## INSIDERS POLL

In 2007, the Bengals will produce:

An AFC North championship, thanks to a high-powered offense

A high-powered offense that is wasted by a leaky defense

More jailbirds than Pro Bowlers



Based on a poll of SN's 32 team correspondents

## BOLD PREDICTIONS

**1** Rudi Johnson will top 1,000 yards rushing for a fourth straight season, but he'll have to share the load with rookie Kenny Irons, whose breakaway speed and cutting ability will ignite the offense.

**2** The defense will remain in the bottom third of the league because the line is old, the secondary is young and the linebackers lack experience.

**3** Rookie Leon Hall will replace Deltha O'Neal as the starting left corner by midseason. O'Neal will be gone after the season.

and 30th in total defense the past four seasons—the club is still searching for answers. Coordinator Chuck Bresnahan spent the offseason tweaking the personnel in his 4-3 unit, but there wasn't an overhaul. The Bengals released veteran Brian Simmons to clear a path for second-year linebacker Ahmad Brooks to start in the middle and signed free-agent tackle Michael Myers, who led the Broncos' linemen in tackles last season.

**Line**—The unit was passive and reactionary last season; it needs to become more aggressive, which will be tough because it's aging. The objective is to contain the run on early downs so that edge rusher Robert Geathers can enter on third down. Geathers broke through with 10½ sacks in 2006, and the team expects him to apply pressure and force turnovers with his explosive quickness.

The starters at tackle are Myers and John Thornton. A strong run stopper, Myers holds his ground at the point of attack but lacks special qualities as a pass rusher. He can play all four line positions, which is a plus. Myers has the size and strength to absorb multiple blockers, which will give Thornton one-on-one matchups inside. Thornton is quick and active but has a tendency to wear down.

Both will get relief from Domata Peko and Kenderick Allen. Peko contributed as a rookie last season and showed excellent quickness, strength and desire. Allen, who is playing on his fourth team in five years, will make an impact because he's such a massive presence, but he must stay healthy.



## SCOUTING REPORTS: DEFENSE

Left end Bryan Robinson is a two-down strongside run stopper who also can help inside. In the nickel, he'll be replaced by starting right end Justin Smith, who will flip-flop sides to make room for Geathers. Smith has a nonstop motor, and he's an excellent run defender and an improving pass rusher. Backup Frostee Rucker, whose rookie season was ruined by a shoulder injury, adds depth and enthusiasm. If he improves his strength and flexibility, he'll give the pass rush some punch. But first, he must prove he can stay healthy. **GRADE: C+**

**Linebackers**—The release of Simmons looked like a gamble until Ed Hartwell joined the fold. Finally healthy, Hartwell will be counted on to make plays all over the field and help the maturation of Ahmad Brooks and Rashad Jeanty. Hartwell is an outstanding run stopper and explosive hitter, but he lacks elite speed and looks uncomfortable at times in passing situations. If he struggles outside, he'll move to the middle, where the club can buy more time for Brooks to mature.

Brooks has everything the team wants in a middle linebacker. He showed flashes of brilliance as a rookie but made too many mistakes. Now he's ready to blossom.

Jeanty, a former end in the CFL, made a smooth transition to strongside linebacker. He is stout at the point of attack and shows good pass-rush moves.

The depth is solid with backups Eric Henderson, Caleb Miller and Landon Johnson. Miller, with good range and instincts, can play inside or outside, and Henderson will back up Jeanty, then switch to end in the nickel defense. Henderson is an excellent pass rusher, but he needs to polish his coverage skills. Johnson has decent experience and has overcome nagging injuries to become a consistent player. Blessed with terrific speed and quickness, he needs to make more big plays.

The problem with this unit isn't talent. It's experience playing together. Getting the linebackers to mesh and play with consistency will be a big challenge, which will become even more complicated if Odell Thurman is reinstated after a year-long suspension. But Thurman made some big plays as a rookie in 2005; the unit will be stronger if he returns. **GRADE: B-**

**Secondary**—No unit is under more pressure. Because of porous coverage, the defense tied for 31st in passing yards allowed. If starting left cornerback Deltha O'Neal doesn't show

**Justin Smith, E**

**Strengths:** Has improved his size and strength. Shows solid first-step quickness. Has a nonstop motor. Displays excellent lateral speed and range. Plays well through traffic and can get down the line in a hurry. Has improved his pass rush.

**Weaknesses:** Has lost some explosiveness. Will struggle when pass-rushing against good, athletic left tackles. Struggles to get pressure if he doesn't win getting to the edge.

**Bottom line:** Smith has matured. He's now the Bengals' top defensive lineman. **Grade: 7.8**

**Bryan Robinson, E**

**Strengths:** Plays with a mean streak. Has excellent strength for his size; can knock back blockers at the point of attack. Has the upper-body strength to maintain separation and is capable of shedding blocks quickly.

**Weaknesses:** Doesn't make many big plays. Lacks lateral mobility as a pass rusher. Doesn't have a lot of pass-rush moves. Lacks ideal explosiveness and great closing speed.

**Bottom line:** Robinson is a competitive technician who is stout at the point of attack and relentless in pursuit. That makes him a quality starter, but he isn't a playmaker. **Grade: 6.5**

**Michael Myers, T**

**Strengths:** Versatile; can play every position on the line. Has a nonstop motor. Plays the correct gap, will keep things bottled up in the running game and can hold his ground at the point of attack.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks special traits. Not a playmaker. Strength is only average. Doesn't do a good job of shedding blocks. Lacks quickness for an interior player.

**Bottom line:** The team cut Sam Adams, so Myers will take over as the starting left tackle. He's an excellent run stopper but is only an average pass rusher. **Grade: 6.5**

**John Thornton, T**

**Strengths:** Quick and active. Has size, athleticism and good speed for a man his size. Shows initial pop getting into blockers and can split double-teams and disrupt in the backfield.

**Weaknesses:** Does not play with consistency in any one area. Tends to wear down when teams run at him.

Plays high and gets driven off the ball.

**Bottom line:** Thornton is a solid performer who understands how to play the game. **Grade: 7.3**

**Ed Hartwell, LB**

**Strengths:** Has good lower-body strength, takes excellent pursuit angles and reads and reacts quickly. Plays with good leverage; rarely is knocked down despite average size. Active in the box, stacks and sheds well and is an explosive hitter.

**Weaknesses:** Doesn't have elite speed or burst. A bit of a liability in space. Not as comfortable against the pass as he is against the run.

**Bottom line:** Hartwell is a solid run stopper. He needs to overcome a history of injuries. **Grade: 7.0**

**↑ Ahmad Brooks, LB**

**Strengths:** An outstanding athlete. A ferocious tackler who attacks the ball-carrier and wraps up very well. An aggressive run defender. Strong in coverage and has soft hands; a playmaker.

**Weaknesses:** Had character issues in college and showed a lack of maturity as a rookie. Must continue to work on the mental part of his game.

**Bottom line:** Brooks is the total package: a linebacker with size who can run, tackle and make plays on the ball. He has the physical tools to be one of the best. **Grade: 7.0**

**Rashad Jeanty, LB**

**Strengths:** Fast and athletic. A sure tackler who sheds well and does a good job of finding the ball. Has the quickness and agility to play in pursuit. Has good change-of-direction skill and ability to play in space.

**Weaknesses:** Still making the transition to linebacker after playing three seasons as an end in the CFL. Will take false steps. Better playing near the line of scrimmage than in coverage.

**Bottom line:** With more experience and a better understanding of the position, Jeanty could be a solid NFL starter for some time. **Grade: 7.0**

**Deltha O'Neal, CB**

**Strengths:** An athletic player who is best making plays in front of him. Can close quickly on the ball and is smooth in and out of cuts. Has good

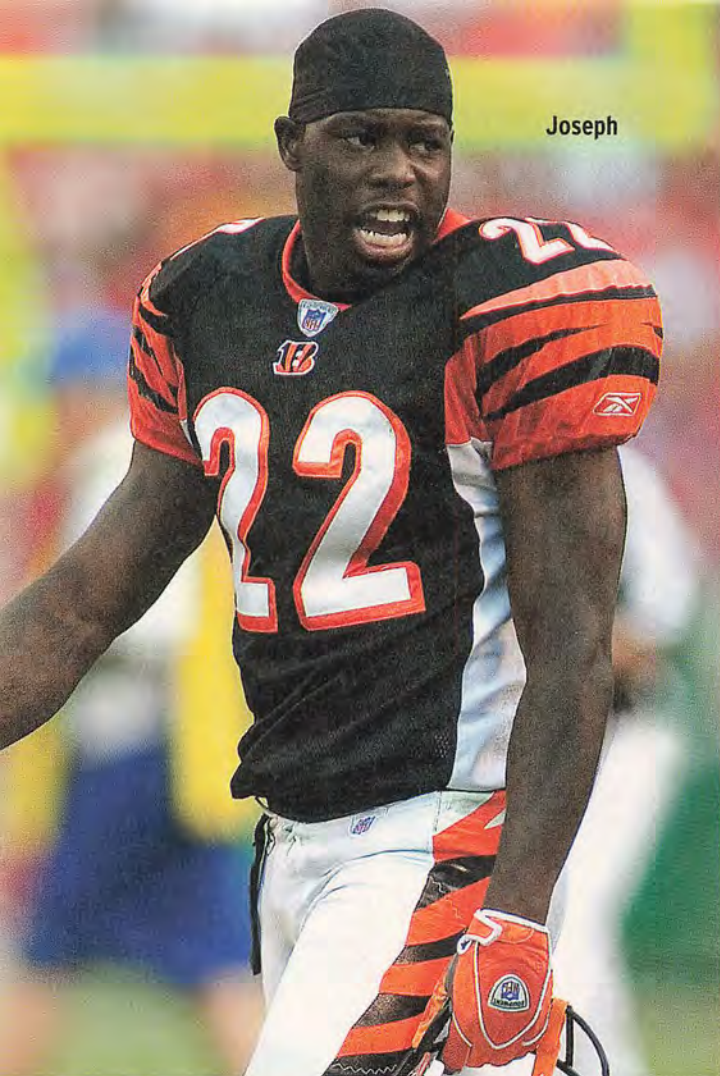
## SECRET WEAPON

**AHMAD BROOKS, LB**

Brooks, a third-round supplemental draft pick, is ready to become an impact player in the middle. Blessed with size, speed and toughness, Brooks is an aggressive run stopper and pass-rushing force with the range and instincts to cover a lot of ground in the passing game. He has star potential.



BOB LEVERONE / SN



Joseph

MATTHEW KUTZ / SN ARCHIVES

hip flexibility and can turn and run with most receivers. Has a nose for the ball. Has excellent hands.

**Weaknesses:** Too cautious at times. Has poor instincts and recognition skills. May end up being a better fit at safety.

**Bottom line:** O'Neal had a down year in 2006, but he's a playmaker and will bounce back. **Grade: 8.0**

#### ↑ Johnathan Joseph, CB

**Strengths:** An exciting player with outstanding speed and a natural athlete with an amazing ability to change direction. Easily turns and runs with receivers. Explosive out of cuts. Has tremendous burst and closing ability. Challenges receivers downfield and will make plays on the ball. Physical and willing in run support. A solid open-field tackler.

**Weaknesses:** Tries to make too many plays and falls victim to play-action fakes, pump fakes and double moves. Durability has been a concern.

**Bottom line:** As a rookie, Joseph learned the intricacies of man and zone coverages and the Bengals system. **Grade: 7.2**

#### Madieu Williams, S

**Strengths:** Versatile, tough and competitive. Doesn't back down from contact. Able to line up over a receiver in the slot in the subpackages. Can blitz from the slot. Has an excellent feel for the game. Has solid range.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to improve his tackling, run support and ball skills. Doesn't always wrap up his tackles. Could add some bulk.

**Bottom line:** Williams is a young, smart player who can help the defense in many different ways. **Grade: 6.9**

#### ↓ Dexter Jackson, S

**Strengths:** A great athlete who is very quick and fluid in coverage. Closes well. A playmaker. Can turn and run with receivers and has excellent range in zone coverage.

**Weaknesses:** Tends to gamble too much and lacks the speed to recover from his mistakes.

**Bottom line:** Jackson is much better in zone than man coverage. Though he struggled to match up vertically, he still has plenty of value because of his playmaking ability. **Grade: 6.0**

## KEY MOVES

### 2007 DRAFT PICKS

Rd.-Pick

GRADE B-

#### 1-18 Leon Hall, CB, Michigan

A top-notch tackler—and the most NFL-ready corner in the draft.

#### 2-49 Kenny Irons, RB, Auburn

A speedy back who can make defenders miss and break long runs.

#### 4-114 Marvin White, SS, TCU

A nasty hitter. Will push Dexter Jackson for playing time.

#### 5-151 Jeff Rowe, QB, Nevada

His size (6-5, 226) and accuracy make him worth developing.

#### 6-187 Matt Toeaina, DT, Oregon

A run-stuffing space-eater with the versatility to play end.

#### 7-230 Dan Santucci, G/C, Notre Dame

A smart, aggressive run blocker who provides depth.

#### 7-253 Chinedum Ndukwe, SS, Notre Dame

A force against the run. Will be groomed on special teams.

### VETERAN PLAYERS

**Additions:** DT Kenderick Allen (FA/Packers), LB Ed Hartwell (FA/Falcons), DT Michael Myers (FA/Broncos), C Alex Stepanovich (FA/Cardinals).

**Losses:** DT Sam Adams (FA), CB Tory James (FA/Patriots), S Kevin Kaesviharn (FA/Saints), LB Brian Simmons (FA/Saints), DT Shaun Smith (FA/Browns), G Eric Steinbach (FA/Browns), TE Tony Stewart (FA/Raiders), WR Kelley Washington (FA/Patriots), LB Marcus Wilkins (FA/Falcons), QB Anthony Wright (FA/Giants).

dramatic improvement, first-round draft pick Leon Hall will steal his job. O'Neal was a Pro Bowler in '05, but a series of nagging injuries have affected him physically and mentally.

The team let right corner Tory James leave as a free agent because it believes Johnathan Joseph is ready to be the guy in his second season. Joseph is a gifted athlete, but he dropped several potential interceptions as a rookie. If he corrects that flaw, he'll be special.

Free safety Madieu Williams is a ballhawk who makes plays all over the field, and strong safety Dexter Jackson is a physical defender with good range. In their second season together, they need to communicate better for the unit to improve. To bolster the unit, the club drafted Hall in the first round and strong safety Marvin White in the fourth. Hall, who was arguably the most NFL-ready corner in the draft, is a smart, physical run defender who is effective in man, zone or press coverage. He is expected to be the nickel back right away and likely will be pushing O'Neal for a starting job by midseason, if not sooner. White, meanwhile, is the kind of enforcer the club desperately needed. He's a nasty hitter who will punish receivers on routes over the middle.

Backup corners Keiwan Ratliff and Greg Brooks have excellent hands, but Ratliff lacks speed and Brooks is injury-prone. The team doesn't have a clearcut option to replace backup free safety Kevin Kaesviharn, who left as a free agent. Ethan Kilmer, Herana-Daze Jones and John Busing are physical, but they're all unproven. **GRADE: D+**

### SPECIAL TEAMS

The coverage units are solid, but late-season special teams miscues cost the Bengals a spot in the playoffs. Special teams coach Darrin Simmons and the trio of kicker Shayne Graham, punter Kyle Larson and long snapper Brad St. Louis will be

working hard to demonstrate consistency this season.

Graham has improved the height and depth of his kickoffs. Larson broke into the NFL's top 10 in two major categories in 2006: He ranked fifth in net average (38.6) and eighth in gross average (44.5). With the exception of a botched snap late last season, St. Louis has been consistent, and he's willing to hustle downfield and throw his body around in coverage.

Perry and Chatman are expected to win the kickoff and punt return jobs. Perry's combination of size, speed and toughness make him an ideal kickoff returner. Chatman is a good fit on punt returns because of his lateral quickness and acceleration. **GRADE: C+**

## STADIUM/MEDIA

Paul Brown Stadium (65,378, artificial)

Tickets: 513-621-8383

Training camp: Georgetown College, Georgetown, KY; 502-868-6300

Radio: WCKY-AM (1360); WOFX-FM (92.5); WLW-AM (700)

Website: bengals.com

## BOTTOM LINE

Anything short of reaching the playoffs will be a major disappointment. The Bengals have enough talent, especially

on offense, to wrestle the division title from the Ravens and Steelers, but they don't have enough playmakers on defense to go far in the postseason. The aging defensive line is shaky, the linebackers are young, and the secondary is weak. The offense will have to generate a lot of points for the team to win games.

But as long as Palmer stays healthy, the window to the Super Bowl will always be open. **SN**

Chick Ludwig covers the Bengals for the Dayton Daily News.



## PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

### OFFENSE

<b>QB</b> ▲ Carson Palmer	<b>LE</b> ● Bryan Robinson
● Doug Johnson	□ Frostee Rucker
<b>FB</b> ● Jeremi Johnson	<b>LT</b> ● Michael Myers
□ Ronnie Ghent	● Kendrick Allen
<b>RB</b> ▲ Rudi Johnson	<b>RT</b> ● John Thornton
● Kenny Watson	● Domata Peko
<b>WR</b> ▲ Chad Johnson	<b>RE</b> ■ Justin Smith
● Tab Perry	■ Robert Geathers
<b>WR</b> ▲ T.J. Houshmandzadeh	<b>SLB</b> ● Rashad Jeanty
● Antonio Chatman	□ Eric Henderson
<b>TE</b> ● Reggie Kelly	<b>MLB</b> ● Ahmad Brooks
□ Ronnie Ghent	● Caleb Miller
<b>LT</b> ■ Levi Jones	<b>WLB</b> ● Ed Hartwell
● Andrew Whitworth	● Landon Johnson
<b>LG</b> ● Andrew Whitworth	<b>LCB</b> ● Deltha O'Neal
● Stacy Andrews	● Leon Hall
<b>C</b> ● Eric Ghiaciuc	<b>SS</b> ● Dexter Jackson
● Alex Stepanovich	● Marvin White
<b>RG</b> ■ Bobbie Williams	<b>FS</b> ■ Madiou Williams
● Stacy Andrews	□ Ethan Kilmer
<b>RT</b> ▲ Willie Anderson	<b>RCB</b> ● Johnathan Joseph
● Scott Kooistra	□ Keiwan Ratliff

### SPECIALISTS

<b>K</b> ■ Shayne Graham	<b>KR</b> ● Tab Perry
<b>P</b> ■ Kyle Larson	<b>PR</b> ● Antonio Chatman
	<b>LS</b> ● Brad St. Louis

▲ Elite ■ Solid ● Adequate □ Fringe

Depth charts updated weekly at [sportingnews.com](http://sportingnews.com)

ALBERT DICKSON / SN

## BENGALS ROSTER

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL exp.	College	How acq.	2006 GP/GS
QUARTERBACKS							
11	Doug Johnson	6-2/218	10/27/77	7	Florida	FA/06	1/0
9	Carson Palmer	6-5/230	12/27/79	5	USC	D1/03	16/16
3	Jeff Rowe	6-5/226	3/21/84	R	Nevada	D5/07	—
RUNNING BACKS							
30	Kenny Irons	5-11/205	9/15/83	R	Auburn	D2/07	—
31	Jeremi Johnson (FB)	5-11/260	9/4/80	5	Western Kentucky	D4b/03	16/11
32	Rudi Johnson	5-10/214	10/1/79	7	Auburn	D4/01	16/15
27	Chris Manderino (FB)	6-0/233	12/22/82	1	California	FA/06	0/0
23	Chris Perry	6-0/224	12/27/81	4	Michigan	D1/04	6/1
33	Kenny Watson	5-11/218	3/13/78	6	Penn State	FA/03	16/0
30	Terrence Whitehead	5-10/215	5/31/83	2	Oregon	FA/06	0/0
35	Quincy Wilson	5-9/220	4/26/81	2	West Virginia	FA/04	3/0
RECEIVERS							
81	Bennie Brazell	6-0/176	6/2/82	2	LSU	D7b/06	0/0
83	Antonio Chatman	5-8/184	2/12/79	5	Cincinnati	FA/06	3/0
49	Tim Day (TE)	6-3/255	9/3/83	1	Oregon	FA/06	0/0
80	Ronnie Ghent (TE/FB)	6-2/253	1/5/80	1	Louisville	FA/06	0/0
18	Skyler Green	5-9/190	9/12/84	2	Louisiana State	FA/06	2/0
89	Gregg Guenther (TE)	6-2/255	1/29/82	2	USC	FA/06	0/0
15	Chris Henry	6-4/197	5/17/83	3	West Virginia	D3/05	13/5
16	Glenn Holt	6-1/193	7/31/84	2	Kentucky	FA/06	11/0
84	T.J. Houshmandzadeh	6-1/197	9/26/77	7	Oregon State	D7/01	14/12
85	Chad Johnson	6-1/192	1/9/78	7	Oregon State	D2/01	16/16
82	Reggie Kelly (TE)	6-4/255	2/22/77	9	Mississippi State	FA/03	16/16
10	Reggie McNeal	6-2/197	9/20/83	2	Texas A&M	D6/06	7/0
88	Tab Perry	6-3/208	1/20/82	3	UCLA	D6/05	2/0
48	Brad St. Louis (TE/LS)	6-3/247	8/19/76	8	Missouri State	D7/00	16/0
OFFENSIVE LINEMEN							
71	Willie Anderson (T)	6-5/340	7/11/75	12	Auburn	D1/96	16/16
79	Stacy Andrews (G/T)	6-7/342	6/2/81	4	Mississippi	D4/04	16/3
53	Eric Ghiaciuc (C)	6-4/300	5/28/81	3	Central Michigan	D4/05	15/13
76	Levi Jones (T)	6-5/310	8/24/79	6	Arizona State	D1/02	6/5
70	Adam Kieft (T)	6-7/328	8/21/82	3	Central Michigan	D5/05	0/0
75	Scott Kooistra (T)	6-6/320	10/14/80	5	N.C. State	D7/03	15/0
62	Nate Livings (G)	6-4/315	3/16/82	1	LSU	FA/06	0/0
65	Dan Santucci (G/C)	6-3/301	9/6/83	R	Notre Dame	D7a/07	—
69	Alex Stepanovich (C)	6-4/301	9/25/81	4	Ohio State	FA/07	5/5
77	Andrew Whitworth (T)	6-7/339	12/12/81	2	LSU	D2/06	16/12
64	Ben Wilkerson (C)	6-4/300	11/22/82	2	LSU	FA/05	3/0
63	Bobbie Williams (G)	6-4/345	9/25/76	8	Arkansas	FA/04	13/13
DEFENSIVE LINEMEN							
67	Kenderick Allen (T)	6-5/328	9/14/78	5	LSU	FA/07	2/0
68	Jonathan Fanene (E)	6-4/295	3/19/82	3	Utah	D7/05	4/0
91	Robert Geathers (E)	6-3/265	8/11/83	4	Georgia	D4b/04	16/0
96	Michael Myers (T)	6-2/300	1/20/76	10	Alabama	FA/07	16/16
94	Domata Peko (T)	6-3/322	11/27/84	2	Michigan State	D4/06	16/1
98	Bryan Robinson (E)	6-4/304	6/22/74	11	Fresno State	FA/05	16/16
92	Frostee Rucker (E)	6-3/263	9/14/83	2	USC	D3/06	0/0
90	Justin Smith (E)	6-4/275	9/30/79	7	Missouri	D1/01	16/16
97	John Thornton (T)	6-3/297	10/2/76	9	West Virginia	FA/03	15/15
66	Matt Toeaina (T)	6-2/307	10/9/82	R	Oregon	D6/07	—
LINEBACKERS							
50	Ahmad Brooks	6-3/259	3/14/84	2	Virginia	SD3/06	11/5
57	Andre Frazier	6-5/234	6/29/82	3	Cincinnati	FA/06	11/0
	Ed Hartwell	6-1/250	5/27/78	6	Western Illinois	FA/07	8/8
78	Eric Henderson	6-2/266	1/8/83	1	Georgia Tech	FA/06	0/0
93	Rashad Jeanty	6-2/245	4/17/83	2	Central Florida	FA/06	12/9
59	Landon Johnson	6-1/227	3/13/81	4	Purdue	D3/04	16/16
58	Caleb Miller	6-3/225	9/3/80	4	Arkansas	D3/04	16/7
52	A.J. Nicholson	6-1/235	6/25/83	2	Florida State	D5/06	2/0
99	David Pollack	6-2/255	6/19/82	3	Georgia	D1/05	2/1
51	Odell Thurman	6-0/233	7/9/83	3	Georgia	D2/05	0/0
DEFENSIVE BACKS							
46	Blue Adams (CB)	5-10/182	10/15/79	4	Cincinnati	FA/07	16/0
27	Greg Brooks (CB)	5-11/182	12/16/80	2	Southern Miss	D6/04	5/0
36	John Busing (S)	6-2/221	9/1/83	2	Miami (OH)	FA/06	7/0
29	Leon Hall (CB)	5-11/193	12/9/84	R	Michigan	D1/07	—
28	Dexter Jackson (S)	6-0/210	7/28/77	9	Florida State	FA/06	12/11
44	Herana-Daze Jones (S)	5-11/205	4/15/82	2	Indiana	FA/06	16/0
22	Johnathan Joseph (CB)	5-11/193	4/16/84	2	South Carolina	D1/06	16/9
43	Ethan Kilmer (S)	6-0/205	1/31/83	2	Penn State	D7b/06	16/0
41	Chinedum Ndukwe (S)	6-2/219	3/4/85	R	Notre Dame	D7b/07	—
24	Deltha O'Neal (CB)	5-11/191	1/30/77	8	California	T-Den/04	12/7
25	Keiwan Ratliff (CB)	5-11/190	4/19/81	4	Florida	D2/04	16/0
26	Marvin White (S)	6-1/199	12/5/83	R	TCU	D4/07	—
29	Brandon Williams (CB)	5-11/186	11/17/80	1	Michigan	FA/06	0/0
40	Madiou Williams (S)	6-1/203	10/18/81	4	Maryland	D2/04	16/16
SPECIALISTS							
17	Shayne Graham (K)	6-0/197	12/9/77	7	Virginia Tech	W-Car/03	16/0
19	Kyle Larson (P)	6-1/204	9/2/80	4	Nebraska	FA/04	16/0

Abbreviations: D1-draft pick, first round; W-claimed on waivers; T-obtained in trade; FA-free-agent acquisition. \*SD-Supplemental draft



# BROWNS

**They may finally start to see the light, but that won't mean a winning record this year**

**SN PICK** 4th, AFC North (3-13)

**BY STEVE DOERSCHUK**

**T**he dog years in Cleveland have descended to depths so dreary that reaching .500 would be a howling success. Even after a blockbuster draft that delivered left tackle Joe Thomas and quarterback Brady Quinn, 8-8 is as high as this team can realistically aspire this year.

Coach Romeo Crennel could feel some heat because the Browns turned in an ugly 4-12 flop in his second season. The offense has continued to sputter, and the team yet again will start a season with a new coordinator and starting quarterback.

The hope is Year 3 of the Phil Savage-Crennel regime will be a turning point for the team. A lot of that hinges on young talents such as linebacker Kamerion Wimbley and wide receiver Braylon Edwards becoming dominant players. If Thomas and Quinn perform ahead of the curve, the team could turn it around more quickly.

## OFFENSE

Most of the staff is new, starting with coordinator Rob Chudzinski, who wants to install an attack style of offense that maximizes the talents of Edwards, tight end Kellen Winslow and new running back Jamal Lewis. That will mean fewer of the quick outs and dump passes that went nowhere last season and more downfield throws to Edwards. However, a lot will ride on the development of Quinn. The new scheme will rely a lot more on audibles, which will help the Browns when opponents load the box against Lewis.

**Quarterbacks**—Last season, Charlie Frye and Derek Anderson didn't prove they could be winning starters. Chances are better than even that Quinn will move ahead of them in training camp and secure the job.

Quinn has the maturity and talent

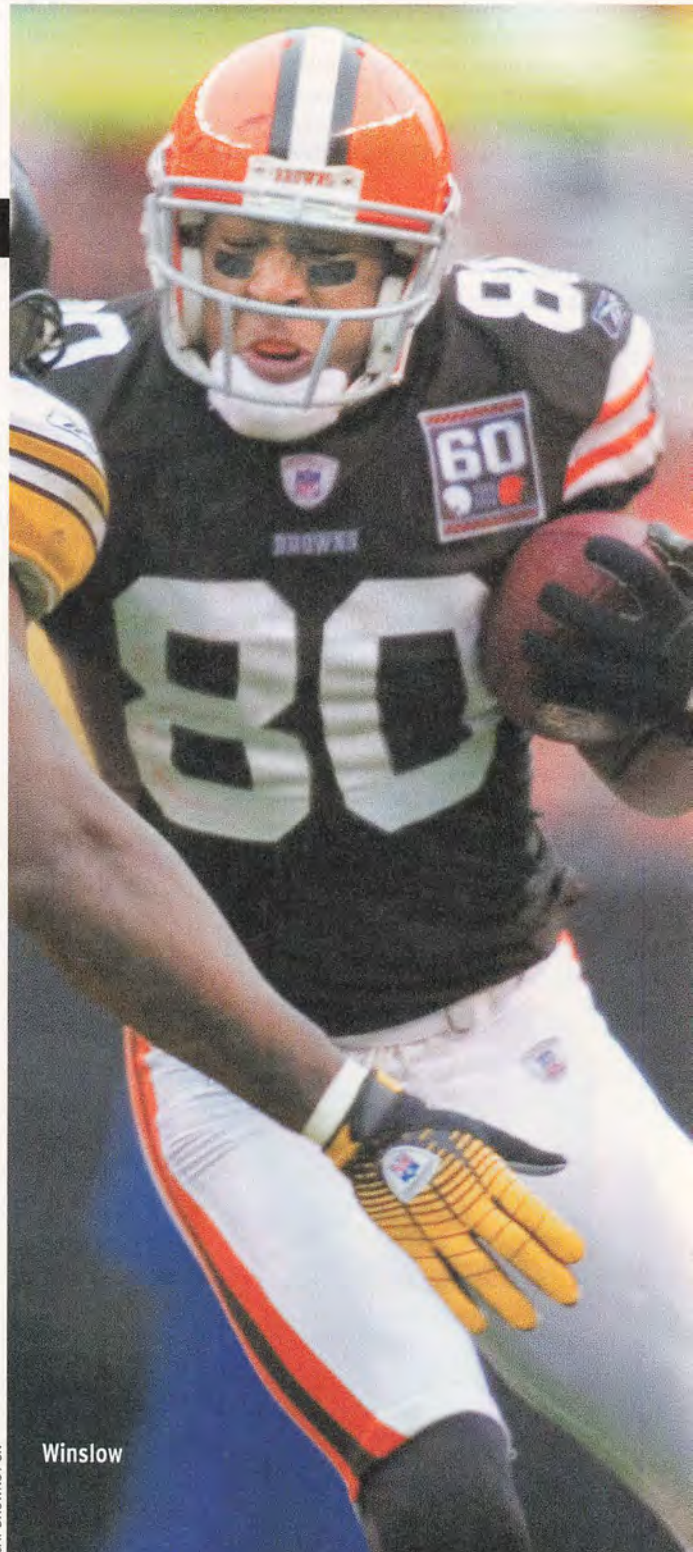
## SCHEDULE

All times Eastern

Sept. 9	PITTSBURGH	1:00
Sept. 16	CINCINNATI	1:00
Sept. 23	at Oakland	4:05
Sept. 30	BALTIMORE	1:00
Oct. 7	at New England	1:00
Oct. 14	MIAMI	1:00
Oct. 21	Open date	
Oct. 28	at St. Louis	1:00
Nov. 4	SEATTLE	4:05
Nov. 11	at Pittsburgh	1:00
Nov. 18	at Baltimore	1:00
Nov. 25	HOUSTON	1:00
Dec. 2	at Arizona	4:05
Dec. 9	at N.Y. Jets	4:15
Dec. 16	BUFFALO	1:00
Dec. 23	at Cincinnati	1:00
Dec. 30	SAN FRANCISCO	1:00

Strength of schedule: T-11th  
Analysis of every Browns game:  
[sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom](http://sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom)

## REGULAR-SEASON WINS



Winslow

JAY DROWNS / SN



to start right away, and he'll likely be given more latitude than most rookies to call audibles. His transition to the NFL will be helped by the training he received from Notre Dame coach Charlie Weis, who worked with Crennel on the Patriots' staff. Quinn must answer questions about his accuracy and ability to thrive in big games.

Frye, who has the edge over Anderson for the No. 2 job, failed to make a noticeable jump last season. If he plays in 2007, he must improve at going through progressions and spreading the ball around. Anderson makes quick reads and has a big arm but must be more consistent. **GRADE: C**

**Running backs**—The Browns have reason to hope Lewis will be an upgrade over Reuben Droughns. Though Lewis might not regain the elite form he showed in 2003, he is bigger and faster than Droughns and still might be able to wear down opponents if the team feeds him the ball. The Browns are counting on Lewis to be a strong inside option.

The Browns lack experienced depth behind Lewis. Change-of-pace back Jerome Harrison is shifty but doesn't have great size and speed. What Jason Wright lacks in size and talent, he makes up for in smarts, and he has picked up Chudzinski's system quickly.

Fullback Lawrence Vickers intrigued coaches as a rookie, and they think he can become a good lead blocker. Journeyman Alan Ricard was brought in to push Vickers. **GRADE: C+**

**Receivers**—One reason Chudzinski was hired was because he has a plan to get Edwards more involved with the offense. Edwards had mediocre production and too many drops as the No. 1 receiver in 2006. He also seemed slow to recover from 2005 knee surgery and needs to restore his speed and rhythm to maximize his Pro Bowl potential.

Joe Jurevicius is a fine complement as the No. 2 receiver but no more than that. A gritty veteran, Jurevicius provides a tall, consistent target over the middle. If Edwards doesn't step up in the lead role, the team will need second-year receiver Travis Wilson to emerge as a prime target. Wilson is a faster, more dynamic receiving option than Jurevicius, but he must prove he has the aptitude for the NFL game.

Tim Carter injects an element of speed, and keep an eye out for Josh Cribbs, a converted college quarterback who possesses

## SCOUTING REPORTS: OFFENSE

### \*Brady Quinn, QB

**Strengths:** Has great technique, with a quick, compact delivery. Accurate within 10 yards and gets the ball to receivers in good spots. Adept at going through his progressions and finding open receivers. Moves well enough in the pocket to avoid sacks.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks the big arm to make intermediate-to-deep throws with zip and accuracy. Underneath defenders get their hands on too many of his passes.

**Bottom line:** Quinn still needs to prove he can shine against top competition, but he will start early in his rookie year because of how mentally prepared he is.

### Jamal Lewis, RB

**Strengths:** Has exceptional balance, toughness and leg drive. Runs with a low pad level and picks up a lot of yards after contact.

**Weaknesses:** Not the same runner he was early in his career. Doesn't provide much as a blocker in pass protection. Not much of a receiver out of the backfield; stiff in his hips and upper body.

**Bottom line:** If he starts to run angry again, Lewis still has the speed and power to be one of the best in the game. Expect him to play with a chip

on his shoulder with his new team.

**Grade: 7.5**

### Lawrence Vickers, FB

**Strengths:** An undersized but effective blocker. Runs with power and shows good patience and cutback ability. A solid receiver. Excels on special teams coverage unit.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks bulk and strength. Can be overpowered by bigger defenders and struggles with one-on-one blocking assignments at the point of attack.

**Bottom line:** Vickers needs to bulk up, but he has good versatility and could develop into a goal-line and short-yardage threat. **Grade: 5.4**

### ↑Braylon Edwards, WR

**Strengths:** Has a good build; can out-leap and outmuscle the league's most aggressive cornerbacks. Displays good speed, with a second gear to outrun defenders. Has terrific hands; can make the spectacular catch.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks focus and will drop easy passes. Needs to improve his route-running and coverage-recognition skills. Didn't show as much speed coming off knee surgery.

**Bottom line:** Edwards has shown promise as a playmaker but has been limited by inadequate quarterback play.

## FANTASY SOURCE PICKS

### STUMBLER

RB Jamal Lewis ▶

### BEST RED ZONE THREAT

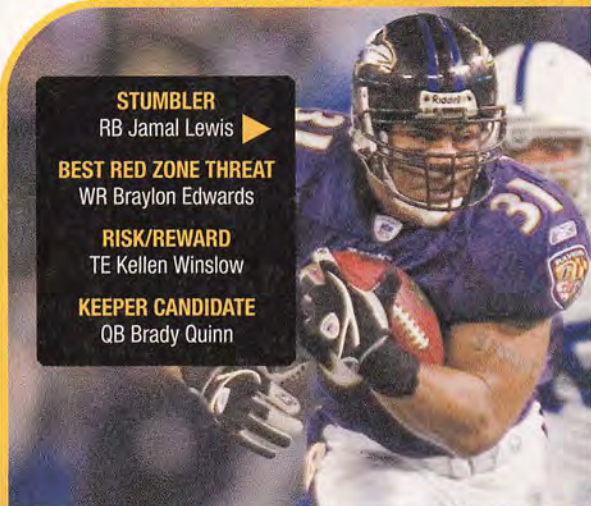
WR Braylon Edwards

### RISK/REWARD

TE Kellen Winslow

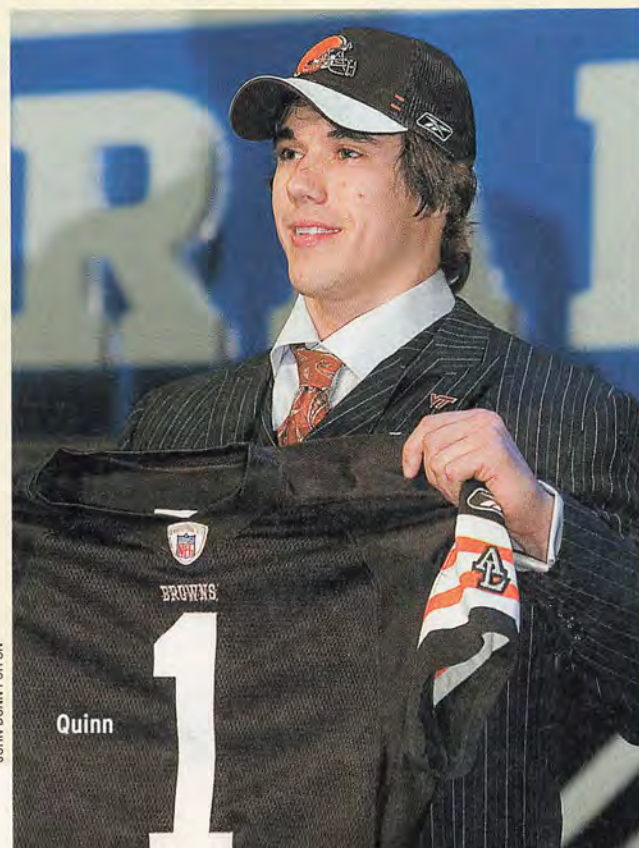
### KEEPER CANDIDATE

QB Brady Quinn



BOB LEVERONE / SN

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JOHN DUNN FOR SN

Players are graded by War Room scouts on a 1-10 scale.

\*Rookies (not graded)

Still, if he wants to become an elite receiver, he needs to mature and stop dropping so many balls. **Grade: 7.2**

### Joe Jurevicius, WR

**Strengths:** Has great upper-body strength, which makes him tough to press. Runs smooth routes and finds soft spots in zones. Has outstanding hands; plucks the ball and makes tough catches in traffic. Has a deceptive second gear.

**Weaknesses:** Aging. Lacks initial quickness and route-running suddenness. Blocks with poor leverage.

**Bottom line:** Jurevicius battled injuries most of last season, but he's a big, savvy possession receiver who still can be an effective starter. **Grade: 7.0**

### ↑ Kellen Winslow, TE

**Strengths:** Catches the ball away from his frame. Has great body control and concentration. Changes directions quickly and bursts out of his cuts. Has the speed to make plays vertically and the strength to fight for balls. Plays with intensity.

**Weaknesses:** An inconsistent blocker. Lacks ideal size. Has major durability concerns.

**Bottom line:** Winslow emerged as a top playmaking tight end in 2006, but it's unclear whether he can build on that because of his offseason knee surgery. **Grade: 7.6**

### Ryan Tucker, T

**Strengths:** Has great strength and can lock on to defenders. Shows good burst. Keeps his feet moving after contact to finish his blocks. Uses his hands well. Has good recovery speed and can adjust to double moves.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks top athleticism. Struggles against speed rushers who get a good jump off the ball. Has an injury history and missed the second half of last season because of mental health issues.

**Bottom line:** Before last season, Tucker was one of the Browns' most consistent linemen. He always plays hard and will boost the line if he returns to form. **Grade: 6.8**

### \*Joe Thomas, T

**Strengths:** Has rare height and athleticism. Shows quick footwork on pass plays and slides out to the corner to cut off explosive edge rushers. Can be a rock against bull rushers.

**Weaknesses:** Must use his hands better to jolt and slow ends. More of a positional run blocker than a physically dominating one.

**Bottom line:** Thomas has all the tools and intangibles to be a great left tackle, and he likely will start right away.

### ↑ Eric Steinbach, G

**Strengths:** An athletic, technically sound player with good toughness. Plays through the whistle. Has solid initial quickness. Smart; takes good angles in the running game and shows excellent awareness in pass protection. Adjusts well to stunts and twists.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal bulk for an interior player. Can be knocked back because of his lack of lower-body strength. Doesn't have the consistent explosiveness to finish run blocks.

**Bottom line:** Steinbach has developed into one of the best guards in the NFL and will immediately improve the Browns' line. **Grade: 8.3**

### Kevin Shaffer, G

**Strengths:** Has good athletic ability. Moves well laterally and can block speed rushers with ease. Takes good angles in the running game and aggressively finishes blocks.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks lower-body strength and can be overpowered when he loses leverage. Gets complacent at times on the back side of plays. Not good blocking at the second level or pulling.

**Bottom line:** Shaffer isn't a dominant lineman, but he's an above-average starter with upside. His versatility could allow him to start at guard or tackle for the Browns. **Grade: 7.5**

### ↓ Hank Fraley, C

**Strengths:** Makes great presnap reads and the necessary line adjustments. Has good recognition skills and picks up blitzers well. A top-notch reach blocker who gets to the second level. Doesn't waste motion. Takes great angles to blocks and rarely makes mental errors.

**Weaknesses:** Has minimal athletic ability. Lacks the power to dominate stronger linemen.

**Bottom line:** Fraley has had a fine run, but he is on the downside of his career. **Grade: 6.7**

KEY: ↑ Ascending ↓ Descending

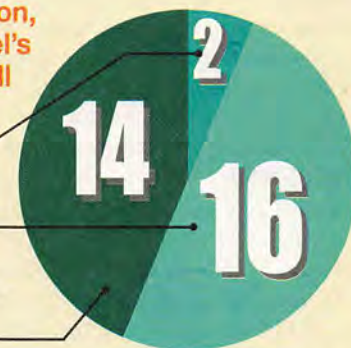
## INSIDERS POLL

After this season, Romeo Crennel's job security will be:

Reinforced with a contract extension

Tenuous after the Browns show only slight improvement

Nonexistent



Based on a poll of SN's 32 team correspondents

## BOLD PREDICTIONS

**1** WR Braylon Edwards will threaten Webster Slaughter's franchise season record of 1,236 receiving yards. Rather than get in his way, Edwards' ego will drive him to tap his immense talent. He will be faster and more focused.

**2** ILB D'Qwell Jackson will lead the team in tackles and make more big plays than he did as a rookie.

**3** TE Kellen Winslow will play every game but won't recapture the electricity he had before his injury nightmares began in 2004.

the big-play ability to move up the depth chart.

Winslow has great hands and led the team in receptions last season, but he must improve at getting open downfield and turning short catches into long gains. It's uncertain how his quickness will be affected by his microfracture knee surgery this offseason. Veteran Steve Heiden is a solid all-around player, which makes him an ideal No. 2 tight end. **GRADE: B-**

**Line**—The never-ending quest to cobble together a strong line continues, but at last there are signs of hope.

The only questions scouts have about Thomas are: 1) Will he be good or great? 2) How long it will take him to hit his stride? The team wants him to play early, and he has the aptitude to make that happen.

Thomas and standout guard Eric Steinbach, a free-agent pickup, could give the Browns an elite left side of the line. Steinbach excels in run and pass protection.

With LeCharles Bentley expected to be sidelined for a second straight year—this time because of complications from knee surgery—Hank Fraley again is expected to start at center. Fraley can be overpowered by bull rushers, but he fires out at opponents with gusto on running plays.

The right side of the line is unsettled, but there are solid options. The unit will get a big boost if Ryan Tucker overcomes the mental health problems that reduced his effectiveness in 2006. Before last season, he was a solid performer and powerful drive blocker.

Tucker has been progressing well, but if he doesn't regain his past form, Kevin Shaffer likely will get the nod. Shaffer was decent at left tackle last season, though he didn't play to expectations. If Tucker starts at right tackle, Shaffer is a good



enough all-around technician to move inside and vie for the right guard job.

Another option at right guard is free-agent pickup Seth McKinney, a good athlete who appears to be healthy after missing 2006 with a neck injury. Among the other backups, Lennie Friedman is undersized but tough, with experience at guard and center. But he could be bumped off the roster by guard Rob Smith, who showed promise as a rookie. **GRADE: B**

## DEFENSE

Crennel and coordinator Todd Grantham have extensive knowledge of the 3-4 scheme, but the defense unraveled in 2006 after showing promise in '05. Cornerback injuries contributed to the unit's woes; the team was forced to provide extra help deep and adhere to more of a "bend but don't break" philosophy. Improved line depth could help the linebackers excel, and if rookie Eric Wright breaks through early at cornerback, Grantham could be more liberal and unpredictable with blitzes.

**Line**—The line's performance will hinge on whether left end Orpheus Roye returns to form. Roye is strong against the run and consistently wins his matchups when healthy, but he was limited to nine games in 2006 because of injuries. At 34, he must prove his knees aren't wearing out.

Free-agent signee Robaire Smith is expected to provide an upgrade at right end. Too often, the Browns have gotten pushed around by teams trying to establish the run inside, and Smith (6-4, 325) will help in that area.

Once a premier nose tackle, Ted Washington is merely a serviceable run stuffer. He still can neutralize double-teams if he gets plenty of rest as part of a rotation. The plan is for Shaun Smith, signed from the Bengals, to take at least half the snaps each game and become the starter in 2008. Smith is about 40 pounds lighter than Washington but has enough bulk for the position and is a high-energy player.

Because the team rotates its linemen, the backups must play well for the unit to be effective. Simon Fraser shows potential as a pass rusher but needs to play stronger against the run. Rookie Chase Pittman has the frame to add bulk and push Fraser for a job. Heading into the season, he will compete with Ethan Kelley to back up Smith. For now, Kelley has the edge because of experience—and he also has the ability to play nose or end in the 3-4. **GRADE: C**

## SECRET WEAPON



### ANTWAN PEEK, LB

The speedy Peek will be hungry to prove the Texans sold him short. Expect him to exploit favorable matchups as opponents focus on stopping Kamerion Wimbley. Peek will play extensively in place of Willie McGinest, especially on passing downs. Don't be surprised if Peek flirts with double-digit sacks.

MATTHEW KUTZ / SN ARCHIVES

## SCOUTING REPORTS: DEFENSE

### Orpheus Roye, E

**Strengths:** Has excellent size and strength. Disruptive, with good quickness. Can penetrate and make plays in the backfield and down the line. Uses his hands well.

**Weaknesses:** Relies on power moves. Lacks top instincts, and sack production is mediocre. Gets out of position and seems a step slow.

**Bottom line:** After an injury-plagued 2006, Roye needs to make a strong comeback to help the defense take another step forward. **Grade: 7.9**

### Robaire Smith, E

**Strengths:** Has solid athleticism for a 3-4 end. Explosive, with the quickness to reach blockers quickly and get to the ballcarrier. Uses his hands well to shed single blocks. Rushes the passer with flair; has solid club and slap moves.

**Weaknesses:** Could be more stout against double-teams. Needs to develop a more consistent motor; sometimes surrenders to blockers.

**Bottom line:** Smith is a nice, versatile addition to the Browns' line. He has the size and speed to be effective in Romeo Crennel's defense. **Grade: 6.6**

### ↓ Ted Washington, T

**Strengths:** Has rare power at the point of attack and excels at stacking blocks and double-teams. Extremely tough to move because of his massive frame. Has very strong hands. Not afraid to do the dirty work.

**Weaknesses:** Strictly a two-down player. Lacks speed, range and pursuit skills. Might be getting too big; has some stamina concerns. Very limited as a pass rusher.

**Bottom line:** When healthy, Washington still has a big impact on first and second down, but he only can play a limited number of snaps at this point in his career. **Grade: 6.7**

### ↑ Kamerion Wimbley, LB

**Strengths:** Has outstanding speed off the edge and a good closing burst to the quarterback. Makes plays in pursuit against the run and has good change-of-direction skills. Takes nice angles and tackles well in the open field. Can drop into coverage in zone-blitz situations. Shows good instincts.

**Weaknesses:** Must add bulk; gets overpowered at the point of attack on

runs directed his way. Needs to do a better job of shedding blockers. Relies too much on his speed; needs to develop more pass-rush moves.

**Bottom line:** Wimbley made an excellent transition to outside linebacker as a rookie and excels as a pass rusher. He's a game-changing player with a lot of upside. **Grade: 8.2**

### Andra Davis, LB

**Strengths:** An aggressive tackle-to-tackle 'backer. Can fill inside running lanes and attack fullbacks in the hole. Uses his hands well to take on blockers. A solid in-the-box tackler. Displays a good feel in underneath zone coverage.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks top-end speed and range. Struggles in man coverage against fast tight ends and backs. Will dive and miss tackles in space.

**Bottom line:** Davis is one of the most consistent playmakers on the Browns' defense. Though somewhat limited, he plays hard and has a bright future. **Grade: 7.9**

### ↑ D'Qwell Jackson, LB

**Strengths:** An aggressive run defender at the point of attack but fares better ranging sideline to sideline. Makes quick, accurate reads and takes good angles. Always in proper position. Brings some pop as a tackler.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal size and speed. Doesn't have the strength to take on bigger blockers and can be pushed off the ball. Lacks the quickness to be an effective pass rusher.

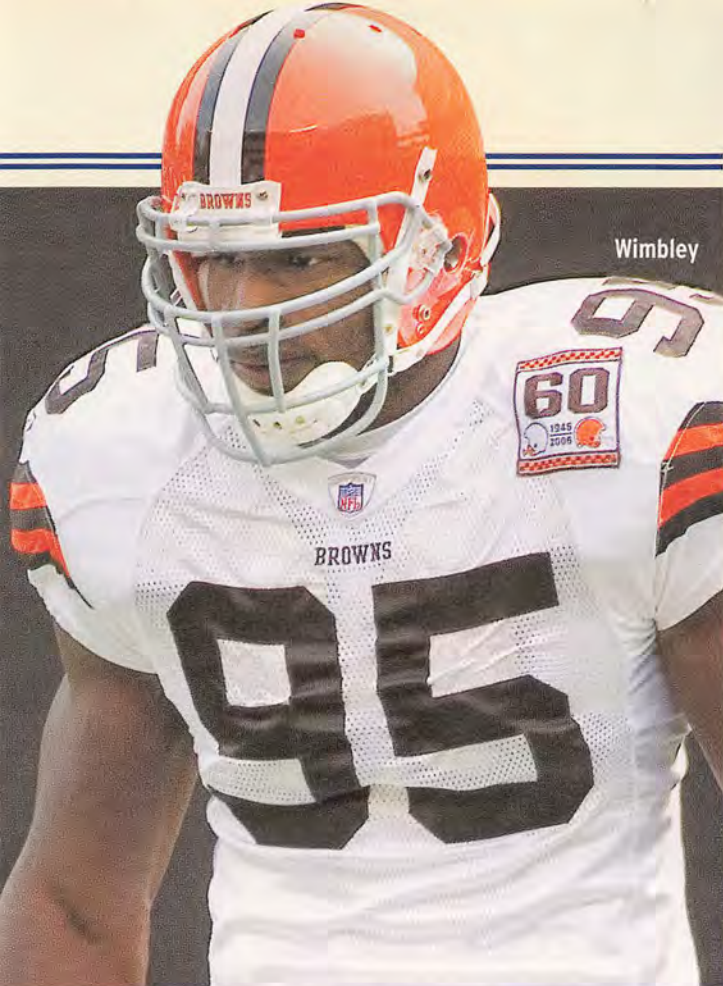
**Bottom line:** What Jackson lacks in physical tools he more than makes up for with his intelligence, instincts and hustle. If he improves his strength and speed, he'll become a top starter. **Grade: 7.8**

### ↓ Willie McGinest, LB

**Strengths:** Plays with excellent leverage and has great short-area explosiveness. Rarely gets engulfed and plays with great instincts and discipline. Can stretch out runs to the outside and stack and shed blockers. Stays square to the hole.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks run-stopping bulk and can get pinned inside. Struggles in space and sometimes loses his assignment in the open field. Lacks flexibility.

**Bottom line:** Despite his age, McGinest



JAY DROWNS / SN

continues to make big plays. His leadership is invaluable to a Browns team that is trying to turn things around.

**Grade: 7.4**

### Leigh Bodden, CB

**Strengths:** A smooth athlete, with the fluid hips to turn and run out of his backpedal. Has quick hands at the line to jam receivers. Effective in man-to-man coverage. Has good ball skills and timing on pass breakups. Solid on special teams coverage.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to improve his strength in press coverage. Gets caught peeking into the backfield too often. Has durability issues.

**Bottom line:** Bodden has good size and skills but was hounded by injuries in 2006. A solid starter, he will have to become the Browns' top corner as their secondary undergoes a makeover. **Grade: 7.6**

### \*Eric Wright, CB

**Strengths:** Has the speed to run with receivers downfield and the explosive burst to recover after getting beat. Shows great ball skills. Makes strong, physical tackles in run support.

**Weaknesses:** A bit thin; could face durability issues. Must improve his technique, especially with his foot-

work and backpedal. A character risk; transferred from USC because of off-field legal issues.

**Bottom line:** Wright has the physical tools to be an NFL starter with improved discipline off the field and improved technique on it.

### ↑Sean Jones, S

**Strengths:** Has the speed and range to handle deep coverage. Does a good job of reading the quarterback and getting a jump on the ball. Excels as an in-the-box defender; physical and aggressive in run support.

**Weaknesses:** Has only average skills in man coverage.

**Bottom line:** Jones is a durable and has no major weaknesses. He is developing into a quality player.

**Grade: 8.0**

### ↑Brodney Pool, S

**Strengths:** A great athlete who is quick and fluid in coverage. Closes well on the ball and will make plays. Can turn and run with receivers. Has excellent range in zone coverage.

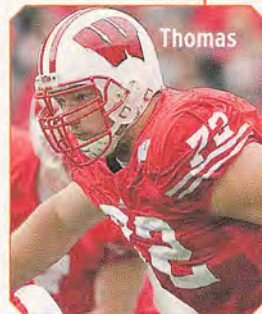
**Weaknesses:** Lacks instincts and gets caught out of position.

**Bottom line:** With more experience, Pool could become one of the top 20 safeties in the league. **Grade: 7.0**

## SCOUT TAKES

### A scout from another team sizes up the Browns

If **Kellen Winslow** can stay healthy, he could eventually become as good as **Tony Gonzalez** and **Antonio Gates**. He has every bit as much talent as they do. ... **Jamal Lewis** has enough left to make an impact in their running game. I don't think he has the breakaway speed like he once did, but he can still pound it inside. ... **Kameron Wimbley** impressed me as a rookie last year. He made a position switch and put up double-digit sacks. He's one of those players who is just going to get better each year. ... **Joe Thomas** is a complete player. I think you can build a line around that kind of guy. When you draft a lineman that high (third overall), you just insert him. He's going to be your left tackle, and that's it. ... The defensive line is getting a little long in the tooth. It doesn't have a lot of depth or guys who can change the game.



Thomas

JAY DROWNS / SN

**Linebackers**—If the line does its job—which is a big *if*—the Browns could feature one of the better linebacker units in the league. They have the depth and star power. With his size and athleticism, Wimbley made a smooth transition to 3-4 outside linebacker. He had 11 sacks as a rookie and will become an even bigger pass-rushing force when he incorporates more moves. Wimbley also has showed run-stopping potential and steady improvement in coverage.

Willie McGinest, the other starter on the outside, isn't the same player he was in his prime with the Patriots, but he was the Browns' best all-around linebacker in 2006. Perhaps just as important, McGinest, 35, was a valuable mentor to Wimbley. This year, he could help free-agent pickup Antwan Peek, who will get plenty of work as the No. 3 outside 'backer. Already a dangerous edge rusher, Peek is expected to improve as a run defender.

Andra Davis, D'Qwell Jackson and Leon Williams give the Browns a strong trio to rotate at inside linebacker. Davis started poorly but trusted his instincts more as last season wore on and is expected to be solid against the run. Jackson, a starter as a rookie, has a sixth sense for the ball that could make him more valuable than Davis. But Jackson needs to add weight without compromising his quickness.

Williams, a fourth-round pick in '06, has intriguing upside. He shone last December and looked particularly fast and instinctive in Week 16, when he had 17 tackles against the Buccaneers. At 6-2, 238, Williams looks more physically imposing than Davis or Jackson.

Matt Stewart, a sound technician, and Chaun Thompson, a good athlete, provide outstanding depth and versatility. **GRADE: B+**

**Secondary**—No third-and-long was too long for opponents who faced the Browns' ravaged group of cornerbacks last year. The team would prefer to play more man coverage, but that will depend on how the defensive backs progress—and whether they stay healthy.

The secondary got a huge lift when the Browns drafted



Wright, who has the speed and instincts to start right away. The coaches believe he has outgrown his character issues. Leigh Bodden has shown promise but was hampered by an ankle injury most of last season. He projects as the No. 1 corner but still has a lot to prove. Bodden has the speed to hold up in man coverage and the smarts to play zone.

Kenny Wright, a free-agent pickup, has enough starting experience to step in if needed. At 6-1, he can hold his own against tall receivers but struggles with shorter speed merchants. Daven Holly could challenge him for the No. 3 corner job. Holly had five interceptions in 12 starts last season, but he gambles a lot. If Gary Baxter, who tore tendons in both knees last season, makes a full comeback, it will be a bonus.

In the Browns' scheme, the safeties are somewhat interchangeable. After dedicating himself to learning the defense, Sean Jones beat out Brodney Pool for a starting job and had a breakout year at strong safety. But Jones must prove he can handle making the calls in the secondary, now that Brian Russell is gone.

Russell's departure means Pool will get another shot at a full-time job. Pool is one of the team's top three athletes but hasn't displayed the temperament to become a star. Mike Adams, who was signed for depth, could step into the starting lineup if needed or fill in at nickel back. **GRADE: C+**

## SPECIAL TEAMS

New coordinator Ted Daisher has faces a tall order in replacing Jerry Rosburg. Under Rosburg, the special teams units were a strength, with good blocking and coverage schemes.

Phil Dawson is among the most accurate kickers in NFL history, but his second half slump last season is cause for concern. The punting job is in good hands with Dave Zastudil, who consistently gets good hang time and had one of the best net averages in the NFL last season. Ryan Pontbriand has become a reliable long snapper.

Cribbs is making a name for himself as a kick returner. Though he lacks super speed, he has a knack for finding openings. Cribbs also could be an option on punt returns but must prove more sure-handed.

Rookie Syndric Steptoe also is a punt return candidate. **GRADE: C**

## STADIUM/MEDIA

Cleveland Browns Stadium  
(73,200, grass)

Tickets: 440-891-5050

Training camp: Browns Training and Administrative Complex, Berea, Ohio; 440-891-5000

Radio: WMMS-FM (100.7); WTAM-AM (1100)

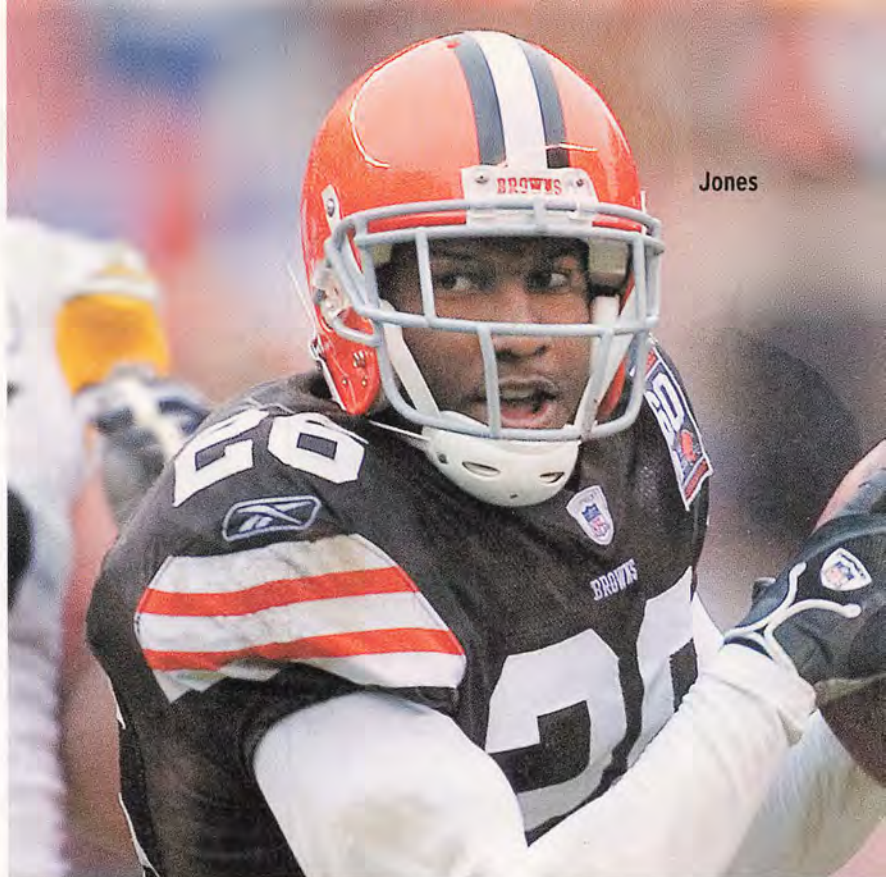
Website: clevelandbrowns.com

## BOTTOM LINE

Despite a few misses, Savage knows what he's doing with personnel and has systematically worked to straighten out a team that lacked a foundation. There now is enough talent to be competitive, and progress will be reflected in the wins column—though that won't be tough to do considering the team went 4-12 in 2006.

An 8-8 record is realistic, given the latest infusion of talent and the development of the nucleus. The onus is on Crennel to field a team that looks like it's building toward a playoff run in 2008. If that doesn't happen, Savage will be looking for a new head coach in January. **SN**

Steve Doerschuk covers the Browns for the Canton Repository.



Jones

## KEY MOVES

### 2007 DRAFT PICKS

Rd.-Pick

**GRADE B+**

1-3 Joe Thomas, OT, Wisconsin

Powerful and technically sound. Will anchor the line for years.

1-22 Brady Quinn, QB, Notre Dame

The quarterback of the future could start right away.

2-53 Eric Wright, CB, UNLV

Has first-round talent and will compete for a starting job immediately.

5-140 Brandon McDonald, DB, Memphis

Versatile but slender. Could struggle against the run.

6-200 Melila Purcell, DE, Hawaii

An incredibly raw practice squad player. The team reached for line help.

7-213 Chase Pittman, DE, LSU

Lacks proper technique. Must get bigger and stronger.

7-234 Syndric Steptoe, WR/KR, Arizona

Short and unpolished but catches the ball securely on returns.

## VETERAN PLAYERS

**Additions:** CB Mike Adams (FA/49ers), WR Tim Carter (trade/Giants), RB Jamal Lewis (FA/Ravens), OL Seth McKinney (FA/Dolphins), DE Antwan Peek (FA/Texans), FB Alan Ricard (FA), DT Robaire Smith (FA/Titans), DT Shaun Smith (FA/Bengals), G Eric Steinbach (FA/Bengals), CB Kenny Wright (FA/Redskins).

**Losses:** G Joe Andruzzi (FA), RB Reuben Droughns (trade/Giants), DL Nick Eason (FA/Steelers), DT Alvin McKinley (FA/Broncos), WR Dennis Northcutt (FA/Jaguars), S Brian Russell (FA/Seahawks), FB Terrelle Smith (FA/Cardinals).

## PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
QB	● Brady Quinn ● Charlie Frye	LE	■ Orpheus Roye ● Simon Fraser
FB	● Lawrence Vickers □ Alan Ricard	NT	■ Ted Washington ● Shaun Smith
RB	■ Jamal Lewis ● Jason Wright	RE	● Robaire Smith ● Ethan Kelley
WR	■ Braylon Edwards ● Travis Wilson	OLB	▲ Kameron Wimbley ■ Antwan Peek
WR	■ Joe Jurevicius ● Tim Carter	ILB	■ Andra Davis ● Chaun Thompson
TE	■ Kellen Winslow ■ Steve Heiden	ILB	■ D'Owell Jackson ■ Leon Williams
LT	■ Joe Thomas ● Kevin Shaffer	OLB	■ Willie McGinest ■ Matt Stewart
LG	▲ Eric Steinbach ● Lennie Friedman	LCB	■ Leigh Bodden ● Daven Holly
C	● Hank Fraley ● Seth McKinney	SS	▲ Sean Jones □ Justin Hamilton
RG	■ Kevin Shaffer ● Seth McKinney	FS	■ Brodney Pool ● Mike Adams
RT	■ Ryan Tucker ● Kelly Butler	RCB	● Eric Wright ● Kenny Wright

## SPECIALISTS

K	■ Phil Dawson	KR	■ Joshua Cribbs
P	■ Dave Zastudil	PR	● Joshua Cribbs
		LS	■ Ryan Pontbriand

▲ Elite ■ Solid ● Adequate □ Fringe  
Depth charts updated weekly at [sportingnews.com](http://sportingnews.com)

Steinbach

## BROWNS ROSTER

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL exp.	College	How acq.	2006 GP/GS
QUARTERBACKS							
3	Derek Anderson	6-6/229	6/15/83	3	Oregon State	W-Bal/05	5/3
11	Ken Dorsey	6-4/211	4/22/81	5	Miami	T-SF/06	1/0
9	Charlie Frye	6-4/218	8/28/81	3	Akron	D3/05	13/13
10	Brady Quinn	6-3/226	10/27/84	R	Notre Dame	D1b/07	—
RUNNING BACKS							
23	Chris Barclay	5-10/180	10/15/83	1	Wake Forest	FA/06	0/0
35	Jerome Harrison	5-9/199	2/26/83	2	Washington State	D5a/06	10/1
31	Jamal Lewis	5-11/245	8/29/79	8	Tennessee	FA/07	16/16
	Alan Ricard (FB)	5-11/237	1/17/77	7	Louisiana-Monroe	FA/07	2/2
47	Lawrence Vickers (FB)	6-0/233	5/8/83	2	Colorado	D6a/06	16/1
29	Jason Wright	5-10/210	7/12/82	3	Northwestern	FA/05	13/3
RECEIVERS							
86	Tim Carter	6-0/200	9/21/79	6	Auburn	T-NYG/07	16/8
16	Josh Cribbs	6-1/192	6/9/83	3	Kent State	FA/05	16/1
87	Darnell Dinkins (TE)	6-4/255	1/20/77	6	Pitt	FA/06	14/2
17	Braylon Edwards	6-3/210	2/21/83	3	Michigan	D1/05	16/15
82	Steve Heiden (TE)	6-5/265	9/21/76	9	South Dakota St.	T-SD/02	16/6
84	Joe Jurevicius	6-5/230	12/23/74	10	Penn State	FA/06	13/8
	Ryan Krause (TE)	6-3/256	6/16/81	4	Nebraska-Omaha	FA/07	0/0
18	Kendrick Mosley	6-2/207	7/21/81	2	Western Michigan	FA/07	1/0
12	Syndric Steptoe	5-9/182	12/6/84	R	Arizona	D7b/07	—
81	Travis Wilson	6-1/213	2/11/84	2	Oklahoma	D3/06	4/1
80	Kellen Winslow (TE)	6-4/248	7/21/83	4	Miami	D1/04	16/16
OFFENSIVE LINEMEN							
57	LeCharles Bentley (C)	6-2/313	11/7/79	6	Ohio State	FA/06	0/0
71	Kelly Butler (G/T)	6-7/330	7/24/82	4	Purdue	W-Det/06	7/5
70	Nat Dorsey (T)	6-7/345	9/9/83	4	Georgia Tech	T-Min/05	13/2
66	Hank Fraley (C)	6-2/300	9/21/77	8	Robert Morris	FA/06	16/16
62	Lennie Friedman (T)	6-3/295	8/13/76	9	Duke	T-Chi/06	16/2
74	Andrew Hoffman (T)	6-4/300	2/15/82	3	Virginia	FA/06	0/0
68	Seth McKinney (C)	6-3/305	6/12/79	6	Texas A&M	FA/07	0/0
64	Ryan Pontbriand (LS)	6-2/255	10/1/79	5	Rice	D5a/03	16/0
77	Kevin Shaffer (T)	6-5/320	3/2/80	6	Tulsa	FA/06	16/16
50	Rob Smith (G)	6-4/306	3/8/84	2	Tennessee	FA/06	1/1
61	Isaac Sowells (G/T)	6-3/324	5/4/82	2	Indiana	D4b/06	1/0
65	Eric Steinbach (G)	6-6/297	4/4/80	6	Iowa	FA/07	16/16
73	Joe Thomas (T)	6-6/313	12/4/84	R	Wisconsin	D1a/07	—
72	Ryan Tucker (T)	6-6/320	6/12/75	11	TCU	FA/02	9/9
DEFENSIVE LINEMEN							
75	Simon Fraser (E)	6-6/295	3/27/83	3	Ohio State	FA/05	16/5
93	Orien Harris (E)	6-3/302	6/3/83	2	Miami	FA/06	2/0
78	Ethan Kelley (E/T)	6-2/320	2/12/80	4	Baylor	W-NE/05	11/1
96	Babatunde Oshinowo (T)	6-1/302	1/14/83	2	Stanford	D6b/06	1/0
69	J'Vonne Parker (E)	6-4/323	6/7/82	3	Rutgers	FA/05	6/0
97	Chase Pittman (E)	6-5/273	5/15/83	R	LSU	D7a/07	—
60	Melita Purcell (E)	6-5/269	2/5/84	R	Hawaii	D6/07	—
99	Orpheus Roye (E)	6-4/320	1/21/73	12	Florida State	FA/00	9/9
98	Robaire Smith (E)	6-4/328	11/15/77	8	Michigan State	FA/07	15/12
91	Shaun Smith (E/T)	6-2/325	8/19/81	4	South Carolina	FA/07	13/0
92	Ted Washington (T)	6-5/365	4/13/68	17	Louisville	FA/06	16/16
LINEBACKERS							
54	Andra Davis	6-1/255	12/23/78	6	Florida	D5/02	14/14
58	D'Owell Jackson	6-0/228	9/26/83	2	Maryland	D2/06	13/13
55	Willie McGinest	6-5/270	12/11/71	14	USC	FA/06	14/13
90	David McMillan	6-3/250	9/20/81	3	Kansas	D5/05	10/0
56	Antwan Peek	6-3/258	10/29/79	5	Cincinnati	FA/07	11/2
	Jason Short	6-4/254	7/15/78	3	Eastern Michigan	FA/07	12/0
59	Clifton Smith	6-3/253	7/21/80	3	Syracuse	FA/06	1/0
52	Matt Stewart	6-3/232	8/31/79	7	Vanderbilt	FA/05	16/4
51	Chaun Thompson	6-2/250	5/22/80	5	West Texas A&M	D2/03	16/2
53	Mason Unck	6-3/235	3/30/80	4	Arizona State	FA/03	16/0
94	Leon Williams	6-2/238	7/30/83	2	Miami	D4a/06	16/3
95	Kameron Wimbley	6-3/245	10/13/83	2	Florida State	D1/06	16/15
DEFENSIVE BACKS							
	Mike Adams (S)	5-11/195	3/24/81	4	Delaware	FA/07	16/8
24	Gary Baxter (CB)	6-2/215	11/24/78	7	Baylor	FA/05	3/3
28	Leigh Bodden (CB)	6-1/192	9/24/81	5	Duquesne	FA/03	9/9
25	Justin Hamilton (S)	6-3/217	9/17/82	2	Virginia Tech	D7/06	10/0
39	Daven Holly (CB)	5-10/192	8/8/82	3	Cincinnati	FA/06	14/12
26	Sean Jones (S)	6-1/215	3/2/82	4	Georgia	D2/04	16/16
	Brandon McDonald (CB)	5-11/181	8/25/85	R	Memphis	D5/07	—
22	DeMario Minter (CB)	5-11/190	2/20/84	2	Georgia	D5b/06	0/0
30	Antonio Perkins (CB)	5-11/190	1/9/82	3	Oklahoma	D4/05	5/0
31	Jerome Perry (CB)	6-0/190	12/15/81	2	Eastern Michigan	FA/06	12/0
21	Brodney Pool (S)	6-2/208	5/24/84	3	Oklahoma	D2/05	16/8
37	Justin Sandy (S)	6-0/214	2/22/82	3	Northern Iowa	FA/06	0/0
24	Eric Wright (CB)	5-11/190	7/24/85	R	UNLV	D2/07	—
	Kenny Wright (CB)	6-1/207	9/14/77	9	Northwestern St.	FA/07	16/9
SPECIALISTS							
13	Kyle Basler (P)	6-3/238	12/27/82	2	Washington St.	FA/06	0/0
4	Phil Dawson (K)	5-11/200	1/23/75	9	Texas	FA/99	16/0
15	Dave Zastudil (P)	6-3/220	10/26/78	6	Ohio	FA/06	16/0

Abbreviations: D1-draft pick, first round; W-claimed on waivers; T-obtained in trade; FA-free-agent acquisition.



DENVER

AFC

# BRONCOS

**In the face of a tumultuous offseason, the championship pursuit continues**

**SN PICK** 2nd, AFC West (10-6)

BY LEE RASIZER

**N**ever in franchise history have the Broncos experienced such a tumultuous period.

It started when their three-year run of playoff appearances ended with a loss to 49ers on New Year's Eve.

Only a few hours after that loss, popular cornerback Darrent Williams was gunned down in a limousine after exiting a downtown Denver club. Receiver Javon Walker experienced the agony of having his teammate die in his arms.

A couple of months later, Broncos personnel attended a second funeral, this time for running back Damien Nash, who collapsed after a charity basketball game.

The offseason also was eventful for less tragic reasons. Four assistant coaches were fired, and the staff was overhauled. Linebacker Al Wilson, a team captain, was released, primarily because of a neck problem. A potential trade for Miami defensive tackle Dan Wilkinson was scuttled when he failed to report for a physical.

Through it all, the front office persevered and actually improved the on-field product in keeping with the club's Super Bowl-or-bust mentality.

## OFFENSE

It all starts on the ground, and newcomer Travis Henry (5-9, 215) will provide a bowling ball force between the tackles. Quarterback Jay Cutler's big arm, complemented by a couple of receivers who can get downfield, gives coordinator Rick Dennison plenty of options. No longer does the passing attack have to depend on play-action set up by the run. Cutler also will be turned loose at times, something Shanahan was reluctant to do with Jake Plummer.

**Quarterbacks**—Suddenly, this is Cutler's team, and based on the five-game trial that ended his rookie season, that's not necessarily a bad thing. Cutler has smarts, a gunslinger mentality, an arm Shanahan loves and a calm demeanor under fire.

That's not to say there won't be growing pains. Cutler at times is so focused on making the big play that he doesn't check down to a safer option. Cutler has been

## SCHEDULE

All times Eastern

Sept. 9	at Buffalo	1:00
Sept. 16	OAKLAND	4:15
Sept. 23	JACKSONVILLE	4:05
Sept. 30	at Indianapolis	4:15
Oct. 7	SAN DIEGO	4:15
Oct. 14	Open date	
Oct. 21	PITTSBURGH	8:15
Oct. 29	GREEN BAY*	8:30
Nov. 4	at Detroit	1:00
Nov. 11	at Kansas City	1:00
Nov. 19	TENNESSEE*	1:00
Nov. 25	at Chicago	1:00
Dec. 2	at Oakland	4:05
Dec. 9	KANSAS CITY	4:15
Dec. 13	at Houston†	8:15
Dec. 24	at San Diego*	8:00
Dec. 30	MINNESOTA	4:15

Strength of schedule: T-14th

\*Monday

†Thursday

Analysis of every Broncos game:  
[sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom](http://sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom)

## REGULAR-SEASON WINS





Cutler

MARC PISCOTTY FOR SN

working to find his comfort zone with the coaches—and vice versa—and the offense has been tweaked to suit his skills. Cutler has some escape ability, but don't expect to see the bootlegs that were Plummer trademarks.

The Broncos signed Patrick Ramsey to back up Cutler and give them a strong No. 2 with similar athletic strengths. In case of emergency, Ramsey likely will be able to execute the game plan without major adjustments. And Ramsey has made 24 NFL starts, which will boost the trust factor with his coaches. Preston Parsons is listed as the third quarterback. **GRADE: B**

**Running backs**—Early in training camp last season, running back Tatum Bell talked about the coaches' lack of trust in him. After the season, Bell was traded to Detroit and Henry was signed to become the workhorse runner the team has lacked since Clinton Portis' departure.

The Broncos' system can be reduced to four words: *one cut and go*. And though Henry is a downhill runner, it might take him time to get used to the stretch plays that are the cornerstone of Denver's attack. Henry's biggest contribution will be the power he provides between the tackles. Mike Bell did a good job as a goal-line runner last year, but the 49ers game demonstrated all too plainly the short-yardage game wasn't up to snuff. Henry, who rushed for 1,211 yards last season for Tennessee, not only has the ability to shed tacklers; he also has breakaway speed in the open field.

Bell lacks elite speed, but he has a solid work ethic and always runs hard. He will spell Henry, and Cecil Sapp could get a few carries as well. Sapp heads a deep fullback group that also includes Kyle Johnson and newcomer Paul Smith. **GRADE: B**

**Receivers**—Last season, Walker showed he was fully recovered from a major knee injury. He displayed his playmaking talents with leaping catches and explosive breakaway ability. With

## SCOUT TAKES

### A scout from another team sizes up the Broncos

**Jay Cutler** is brimming with ability. You could see it last year.

He has all the tools; he just needs time on the job. A lot of people criticized the Broncos for playing him last year when they were still in the playoff hunt, but that's going to pay off for them. ... I like

**Travis Henry**. He's a low, compact, physical runner who's going to fit their zone-blocking scheme. ... Some people are saying **Champ Bailey** and **Dre' Bly** are going to be the best cornerback tandem in the league. I'm not so sure about that. Bly is a good complementary corner who's going to be tested a lot, and he gave

up a lot of plays for Detroit the last couple of years. ... Losing **Al Wilson** leaves a glaring hole at middle linebacker. He was the heart and soul of their defense. Besides his athleticism and play on the field, they're going to miss his leadership.



Henry

BOB LEVERONE / SN

## SCOUTING REPORTS: OFFENSE

Cutler's big arm, Walker's positives will be accentuated to the point where a 1,300- to 1,500-yard season is possible—only, however, if an improved surrounding cast doesn't steal some of his spotlight.

Brandon Marshall made huge strides in the final few games of his rookie season. He has shown the ability to break tackles and a willingness to fight for passes in traffic. Crafty veteran Rod Smith, who played last season with a painful hip injury, completes a threesome that, talentwise, is the best Denver has had in many years. Free-agent signee Brandon Stokley will compete for playing time, but first he must prove he has recovered from an Achilles' injury.

Cutler will benefit from better options at tight end. The Broncos know Daniel Graham is an outstanding blocker. But they also believe he was underused as a receiver in New England and will give him more chances on intermediate routes.

Second-year tight end Tony Scheffler also could be a factor. He has developed good chemistry with Cutler and has bulked up to improve his blocking. And don't forget Stephen Alexander, who can pair with Graham in a two-tight end alignment that will bolster Denver's run game. **GRADE: B-**

**Line**—The stability of Denver's front line took a hit early last season when left tackle Matt Lepsis went down with a knee injury, which forced untested Erik Pears into the lineup. That, coupled with Adam Meadows' inability to stay healthy at right tackle and George Foster's inconsistency, resulted in issues with short-yardage situations and pass protection.

Lepsis' return is huge. He's an underrated player whose quick feet and technique cover up for a lack of bulk. And the Broncos got some insurance when they drafted athletic Notre Dame tackle Ryan Harris in the third round.

With the trade of Foster, Pears slides to right tackle, where he is a better fit. He'll compete for a starting job with Meadows, who has the toughness and experience to handle the role if his body holds up. There's also a long-shot possibility that second-year pro Chris Kuper could slide over from right guard to right tackle, where he has little experience. But more likely, Kuper will compete with newcomer Montrae Holland at guard to

### ↑ Jay Cutler, QB

**Strengths:** Has good size and strength and a strong arm. Can make every throw with good velocity and touch. Has mobility and is strong enough to throw across his body when scrambling. Smart, sees the field well and can find the checkdown receiver. A competitor and leader who plays hard.

**Weaknesses:** Can be overconfident. Will make aggressive mistakes and lose accuracy when he doesn't set his feet. Needs to improve mechanics.

**Bottom line:** Cutler is a playmaker with great physical tools, but he must learn not to force plays. He's the future of the franchise. **Grade: 7.9**

### ↑ Travis Henry, RB

**Strengths:** Runs low to the ground and stays under control. Has vision and patience. Shows good burst to the hole and can bounce outside. Runs away from some defenders after getting past the line. Versatile and has good hands; a smooth route runner. Generates coverage mismatches.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal height. Has had fumbling problems and off-field issues. Not a strong blocker. Gets out of position against blitzers and can be overwhelmed by bigger linebackers.

**Bottom line:** Henry's running style will be a good fit in Denver's zone-blocking scheme. He runs hard, attacks the hole, makes one cut—and he's gone. **Grade: 7.5**

### ↑ Javon Walker, WR

**Strengths:** A big target who creates mismatches against smaller defenders. Has sneaky speed and a second gear to break away. Runs precise routes and finds soft spots in zones. Adjusts to the ball and is strong going after it.

**Weaknesses:** Doesn't burst off the line or out of cuts. Struggles against press coverage when he doesn't use hands. Catches the ball against his body too often; sometimes gives average effort.

**Bottom line:** Walker has re-emerged as a valuable deep-ball threat, and he also has route-running skills and elusiveness in the open field. He can score from anywhere. **Grade: 7.7**

### ↑ Brandon Marshall, WR

**Strengths:** A physical receiver with size and a wide frame. Has the ability to catch the ball away from his body. Plays with good balance and is

a solid blocker.

**Weaknesses:** Doesn't have elite speed and won't break away from faster defenders. Not a deep threat. Has had off-field issues.

**Bottom line:** Marshall has the size and strength to be a red zone target, but he's limited by lack of speed and elusiveness. He will be given every chance to claim Rod Smith's starting spot. **Grade: 7.1**

### ↓ Rod Smith, WR

**Strengths:** A diligent worker who has lost explosiveness but not instincts. Has solid hands and ability to make acrobatic catches. Tough, has decent size and is good in traffic. Still makes things happen after the catch.

**Weaknesses:** Struggles getting off the line. Lacks lateral quickness and plays more in a straight line.

**Bottom line:** Smith is the ultimate pro, but he is not the player he once was and offseason hip surgery won't make his job any easier. He likely will yield his starting role but still can be a valuable third receiver. **Grade: 6.9**

### ↑ Daniel Graham, TE

**Strengths:** Has good size, speed and athleticism. Can snatch balls away from his body and make tough catches in traffic. Has a knack for running vertical routes and attacking the seams. Excellent after the catch; uses hands well and separates from jams. Blocks with a nasty edge.

**Weaknesses:** Will disappear at times. Injury history is a concern.

**Bottom line:** Graham, a very good blocker, will be more involved as a receiver than he was in New England. **Grade: 7.6**

### Matt Lepsis, T

**Strengths:** A good athlete with quick feet and the ability to pull and trap. Moves well to the second level and takes good angles. Quick off the ball and into his pass-blocking setup. Has active hands; can punch and reset.

**Weaknesses:** Not a power player. Sometimes has trouble against bull rushers and gets pushed back. Will

## FANTASY SOURCE PICKS

#### STUD

WR Javon Walker ▶

#### SLEEPER

WR Brandon Marshall

#### NO. 1 POTENTIAL

RB Travis Henry

#### ON THE RISE

QB Jay Cutler

#### MR. RELIABLE

K Jason Elam



MARC PISCOTTY FOR SN

Fantasy Source Football is your online fantasy authority. Go to [fantasy.sportingnews.com/nfl](http://fantasy.sportingnews.com/nfl).

Players are graded by War Room scouts on a 1-10 scale.  
\*Rookies (not graded)



Graham

CJ GUNTHER FOR TSN

overextend in his pass set and get beaten back inside.

**Bottom line:** Lepsis is a former college tight end, and his athletic ability makes him a perfect fit in the Broncos' system. He must prove he has the same quickness after suffering a torn ACL last season. **Grade: 7.9**

#### ↓ Erik Pears, T

**Strengths:** Extremely tall and fairly athletic; can move laterally. Has long arms and an adequate initial punch.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks strength and bulk. Stiff and doesn't absorb bull rushers.

**Bottom line:** Pears did a decent job filling in for Matt Lepsis last year, but he lacks the physical tools and athletic ability to be a consistent starter. He could start at right tackle but won't be much more than a stopgap. **Grade: 6.3**

#### ↑ Ben Hamilton, G

**Strengths:** Has good power for his size; delivers a violent initial punch and places his hands well. Plays with leverage and keeps driving with his legs. Sets up quickly. Adjusts well to line stunts and blitzes.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks bulk. Plays with a narrow base and can be bull-rushed in pass protection.

**Bottom line:** Hamilton is a nice fit in the Broncos' zone-blocking scheme. He is smart and tough, and his technique is sound. **Grade: 8.0**

#### ↑ Chris Kuper, G

**Strengths:** An outstanding athlete with good strength and quickness. Shows leverage and power when run blocking. Consistently gets to the linebacker level and hits moving targets. Works well when pulling and trapping. Sets quickly in protection.

**Weaknesses:** Must improve strength. Can be overpowered by bigger, stronger pass rushers. Needs to improve technique.

**Bottom line:** Kuper is a very good athlete who took to the pro game quickly. His mobility is valuable in the Broncos' blocking scheme. **Grade: 7.5**

#### ↓ Tom Nalen, C

**Strengths:** Intelligent and has an excellent feel for the game. Plays with a high motor. Quick off the snap, athletic and takes excellent blocking angles. Can chip and get to the second level. Excellent in protection and plays effectively when less than 100 percent.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks size and strength at the point of attack. Getting old by football standards.

**Bottom line:** Nalen, the prototypical lineman for the Broncos' scheme, is quick, mobile and smart. And he still ranks among the top centers in the NFL. **Grade: 7.8**

**KEY:** ↑ Ascending ↓ Descending

## INSIDERS POLL

The league's best cornerback duo is:



Based on a poll of SN's 32 team correspondents

## BOLD PREDICTIONS

- 1 Denver will have a more varied offensive attack. Though Javon Walker will be the top target, his overall numbers won't reach the levels he desires to join the league's elite.
- 2 The Broncos have tried the backfield combo approach with mixed results. Travis Henry will give the team its first 1,500-yard rushing threat since the Clinton Portis days.
- 3 D.J. Williams will thrive in new coordinator Jim Bates' scheme. His playing time will increase and his comfort level at middle linebacker will grow as the season progresses.

replace the departed Cooper Carlisle. Holland (6-2, 322) would make the interior of the line bigger and better able to deal with the ever-increasing size of the league's defensive tackles.

Tom Nalen, who returns at center for a 14th season, played well last year, thanks to healthy knees. Left guard Ben Hamilton, who has to cut down on penalties, is athletic and mobile, though he needs to play with a better initial punch and power. Hardworking, versatile lineman Chris Myers is the top interior backup. **GRADE: B-**

### DEFENSE

New coordinator Jim Bates is one of the most respected defensive minds in the league. He sat out 2006 after an impressive 2005 in Green Bay, and hiring him was a coup for Shanahan. Bates likes his interior linemen big, his ends aligned wide and his pressure consistent. He is known for running an aggressive 4-3 that relies on quick linebackers—a good fit because the Broncos have a fast unit headed by D.J. Williams and Ian Gold. With Champ Bailey and newcomer Dre' Bly at cornerback, the

Broncos won't hesitate to blitz and let their backs match up one-on-one downfield.

**Line**—The line was deemed a critical area of need entering the draft, thanks in part to the failure to land Wilkinson or end Patrick Kerney. Not even the signing of free-agent tackle Alvin McKinley could keep the Broncos from their appointed rounds on draft day, when three of their four picks were defensive linemen, all of whom could play immediately.

Look for Jarvis Moss, Denver's top pick, to make an impact as a third-down pass rusher. He has excellent speed and long arms and only needs to gain weight and lower-body strength to morph into a full-time starter. The Broncos now have two edge rushers with terrific quickness. Second-year right end Elvis Dumervil led the team with 8½ sacks last season.

Second-round pick Tim Crowder is more stout than Moss and could help against the run on early downs. But the pick that might impact the line most is Florida tackle Marcus Thomas, a first-round talent who fell to the fourth round because of off-field concerns. A line desperate for a big, athletic space-eater in the middle welcomes Thomas (6-3, 296), who has a legitimate chance to start at left tackle alongside Gerard Warren.

Coaches are hoping for a healthy and more motivated Warren because depth in the middle is only OK. McKinley likely will be the top backup, but a dependable No. 4 tackle—maybe Demetris Neale or Antwon Burton—will have to emerge.

Ebenezer Ekuban has the size and ability to be a three-down player at left end but might lose snaps to Crowder, depending on the rookie's development. Kenard Lang was acquired last season to provide help on third down, but Courtney Brown's season-ending knee problems gave Lang bigger responsibilities. Lang's snaps figure to be more limited this season. Veteran John Engelberger supplies experience and effort. **GRADE: C**

**Linebackers**—Wilson's departure was a stunning development. And replacing one of the team's captains and vocal leaders will be one of the keys to the season.

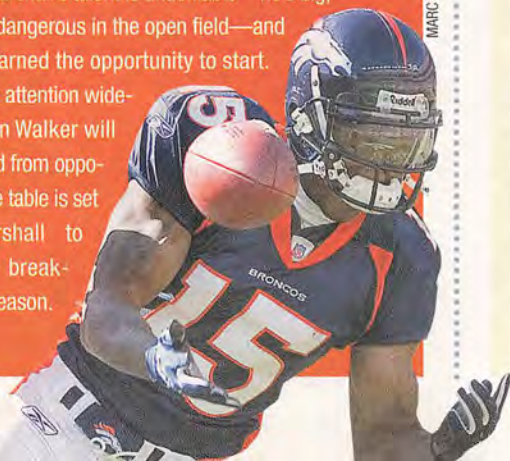
The plan for now is to move Williams from the strong side to the middle. Williams has had only brief trials there, so getting him acclimated quickly will be crucial. At the very least, Williams' playing time figures to increase because he'll get to play in the nickel full time.

## SECRET WEAPON

### BRANDON MARSHALL, WR

Teammates marveled at the progress he made as a rookie. Marshall's talent is undeniable—he's big, fast and dangerous in the open field—and he has earned the opportunity to start.

Given the attention wide-out Javon Walker will command from opponents, the table is set for Marshall to have a breakthrough season.



MARC PISCOTTY FOR SN

## SCOUTING REPORTS: DEFENSE

### Elvis Dumervil, E

**Strengths:** A relentless pass rusher with speed off the edge. Uses hands well when shedding. Stronger, tougher and more aggressive than size would suggest. Uses long arms well to knock down passes.

**Weaknesses:** Lack of size hurts against the run. Relies too much on speed; gets overwhelmed if slow off the snap. Struggles to adjust to screen passes and draws.

**Bottom Line:** Dumervil, a good situational pass rusher as a rookie, will get a chance to become a three-down player this season. **Grade: 7.0**

### Ebenezer Ekuban, E

**Strengths:** Makes solid initial contact. Has good awareness and a feel for blocking schemes in the run game. Has an excellent motor and is effective in pursuit. Has quickness off the edge and flashes bull-rush power.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks toughness and quickness. Undersized and is always nicked up. Stiff-legged and has poor agility and flexibility. Loses his balance on contact. Needs more rush moves.

**Bottom line:** Ekuban knows how to pass rush but is better suited as a backup than a starter. **Grade: 6.5**

### \*Jarvis Moss, E

**Strengths:** An outstanding athlete who anticipates the snap and has the burst to beat tackles around the corner. Has good rush moves to beat one-on-one blocks. Has the flexibility to bend his knees and play with leverage. Adept at getting his hands up to tip passes.

**Weaknesses:** A little on the thin side. Doesn't use his hands well to protect his legs from cut blocks. Lack of bulk allows some blockers to lean and drive him into the ground.

**Bottom line:** Moss must bulk up and play with leverage and aggressiveness. He eventually will find his niche as a productive pass rusher.

### ↓Gerard Warren, T

**Strengths:** Has good size, strength, athleticism and quickness. Can penetrate and hold his ground at the point of attack.

**Weaknesses:** Only plays hard when he feels like it and is poorly conditioned. Lacks the desire to consistently shed blocks and get to the ball.

**Bottom line:** Warren is big and strong enough to occupy blockers. He's at his

best as a run defender but lacks the quickness to create pressure from the interior. He's a capable starter but not a playmaker. **Grade: 7.2**

### \*Marcus Thomas, T

**Strengths:** A good athlete with the quickness to be consistently disruptive. Gets on top of blockers in a blink. Shows the hand punch and strength to jolt and drive linemen back. An effective bull rusher. Clogs the middle against inside runs and frees arms to make tackles.

**Weaknesses:** A character risk; was constantly in trouble at Florida for various off-field issues. A potential headache.

**Bottom line:** Thomas may have been the best defensive tackle in the draft and would have been a first-round pick if not for the off-field issues. If he stays out of trouble in Denver, he'll be worth the gamble.

### Ian Gold, LB

**Strengths:** Has an explosive first step and sideline-to-sideline range. Takes good angles and has improved his recognition skills. Plays with a nonstop motor and is a demon in pursuit. Can blanket most backs in man coverage and has excellent range and technique in zone schemes.

**Weaknesses:** Undersized and injury-prone. Can be engulfed by big blockers and wears down late in games. Sheds blocks slowly and creates running lanes by trying to avoid contact.

**Bottom line:** The speedy Gold makes plays with sheer athleticism and toughness. **Grade: 8.0**

### ↑D.J. Williams, LB

**Strengths:** Has speed, range and change-of-direction skills. Closes on the ball quickly in coverage. Gets into gaps quickly against the run. A solid hitter and wrap-up tackler. Plays under control and has recovery speed when caught out of position.

**Weaknesses:** Can be too straight-line on his blitzes. Runs around blocks instead of through them. Looks to make the big play but guesses too often and gets caught out of position.

**Bottom line:** Williams has been an outstanding player on the strong side and



## KEY MOVES

### 2007 DRAFT PICKS

Rd.-Pick

GRADE **B**

**1-17 Jarvis Moss, DE, Florida**

Has large wingspan and top-end speed; will inject life into the pass rush.

**2-56 Tim Crowder, DE, Texas**

Very strong. Will make plays—10½ sacks, 19 tackles for loss as a senior.

**3-70 Ryan Harris, OT, Notre Dame**

Has the footwork to make a seamless transition to the NFL.

**4-121 Marcus Thomas, DT, Florida**

Has great quickness; uses his hands well. Could start right away.

### VETERAN PLAYERS

**Additions:** CB Dre' Bly (trade/Detroit), TE Daniel Graham (FA/Patriots), RB Travis Henry (FA/Titans), G Montrae Holland (FA/Saints), DT Alvin McKinley (FA/Browns), QB Patrick Ramsey (FA/Jets), FB Paul Smith (FA/Rams), WR Brandon Stokley (FA/Colts).

**Losses:** RB Tatum Bell (trade/Lions), DE Courtney Brown (FA), LB Patrick Chukwurah (FA/Buccaneers), OT George Foster (trade/Lions), DT Michael Myers (FA/Bengals), QB Jake Plummer (trade/Buccaneers), LB Al Wilson (FA).

If the Williams experiment fails, he can slide back to the strong side and Nate Webster or free-agent pickup Warrick Holdman can man the middle. Webster is a thumper between the tackles, and Holdman's versatility and experience appealed to the Broncos, who also injected former Seahawk D.D. Lewis into the competition just days before the draft. Lewis has speed and playmaking ability and special teams experience.

Gold could have a big year on the weak side if the horses up front keep linemen off him. He is one of the game's fastest linebackers but must improve his tackling. Louis Green will back up Gold; he's unproven on defense but is a special teams contributor. **GRADE: B-**

**Secondary**—Bly, acquired to replace Darrent Williams, gives the team another ballhawking man-to-man defender to pair with Bailey. Often matched up against the opponent's best receiver in Detroit, Bly will instead be asked to shut down the No. 2 option. And he will get plenty of work.

Quarterbacks try to avoid Bailey, who has 18 interceptions over the last two seasons and long has been one of the NFL's top defenders. Bailey mostly played off receivers under former coordinator Larry Coyer because it allowed him to read the backfield and use his instincts to move on the ball. But Bailey and Bly, because of their lockdown abilities, might be asked to play more press coverage under Bates.

Domonique Foxworth retains his role as a nickel defender. He's a heady player with top-end speed. Karl Paymah is the dime back; he made some plays in limited action last year but doesn't appear to have the coaches' trust for an expanded role.

Free safety John Lynch will have to fill the leadership void created by Wilson's exit. And Lynch might give up some of his blitzing duties to become more of a rover who provides run support and coverage from a variety of angles. Strong safety Nick Ferguson is coming off a knee injury. He is strong in run support but lacks speed in coverage. Depth is a problem at safety—Curome Cox and Hamza Abdullah don't inspire a lot of confidence. **GRADE: B-**

### SPECIAL TEAMS

The inconsistency of this unit has been a nagging problem.

hasn't received the recognition he deserves. With Al Wilson gone, Williams will get a shot in the middle. **Grade: 7.6**

#### Champ Bailey, CB

**Strengths:** Has athleticism, skills and the swagger of the top cover corner. Can shadow and lock down No. 1 receivers. Has elite transition quickness, recovery speed and ball skills. Holds up well against double moves. Can jam and ride a receiver downfield. Gives a good effort in run support.

**Weaknesses:** Occasionally can be pushed around by big receivers. Keeps hands too low in press coverage. Has problems tracking the ball at times. Will gamble to make plays. **Bottom line:** Bailey remains the best

cornerback in the game and is a high-character leader. **Grade: 9.4**

#### ↑Dre' Bly, CB

**Strengths:** Has fluid hips and top-end speed. Can turn and run with fast receivers. Breaks and closes on the ball quickly. Tough for his size. Takes calculated risks and has good ball skills. Holds up well in man-to-man.

**Weaknesses:** Undersized and has some trouble against big receivers. Lacks strength and struggles to shed blocks. Has had durability issues.

**Bottom line:** Bly wasn't as effective in coverage last season but remains a solid player with big-play potential.

**Grade: 7.5**

#### John Lynch, S

**Strengths:** A strong hitter with a nose for the ball and a feel for the game. Tough and will play through injuries. Plays with a mean streak against the run. Seldom is out of position.

**Weaknesses:** Sometimes takes poor angles in coverage and lacks the speed to recover. Has some trouble against athletic tight ends.

**Bottom line:** The aging Lynch still has the tools, knowledge and experience to get the job done. He's a natural leader who makes Denver's young players better. **Grade: 7.4**

#### Nick Ferguson, S

**Strengths:**

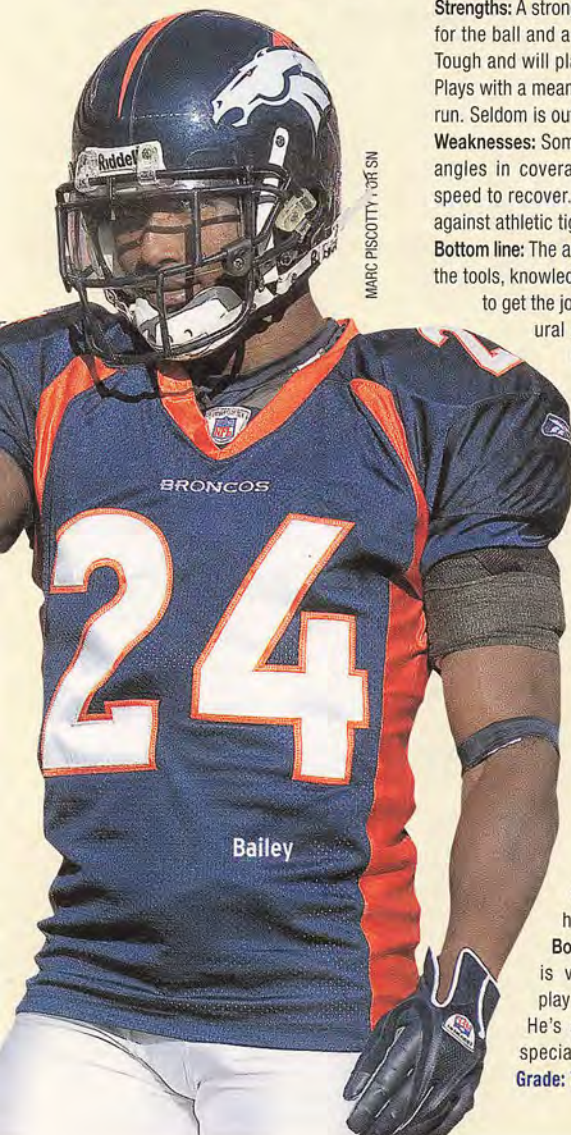
Plays hard and physical. A solid hitter who is effective on run blitzes. Has good instincts playing the ball in front of him.

**Weaknesses:**

Speed and range are average. Has a disadvantage in jump-ball situations because of his height (5-11).

**Bottom line:** Ferguson is versatile and can play either safety spot. He's also an excellent special teams player.

**Grade: 7.1**



Enter Scott O'Brien, who was a well-respected special teams coach in Cleveland, Baltimore and Carolina.

Todd Sauerbrun, who went to three consecutive Pro Bowls under O'Brien in Carolina, will replace Paul Ernster on punts and kickoffs. In the playoffs last season for New England,

Sauerbrun demonstrated he still has a big leg. Jason Elam was 27-for-29 on field goal attempts last season. Entering his 15th season, he remains one of the league's most reliable kickers.

The biggest need is for an explosive return man. Denver hoped receiver Domenik Hixon was the answer when

it drafted him a year ago, but a foot problem sidelined him for the season. The Broncos tried a variety of options without much success. The job will be Hixon's to lose. **GRADE: C-**

## BOTTOM LINE

In a tumultuous offseason, the front office never took its eyes off the prize—a return to Super Bowl contention. It added Henry, Graham and Bly to a solid core and came away with a roster built for January. There are obstacles, however. The Chargers are one. And a schedule that includes a late-season stretch of six road games in eight weeks is another—especially considering the team has a history of fading down the stretch.

But if the Broncos can take advantage of a home-loaded early schedule with a quick start and get a jolt from their rookie defensive linemen, look for them to hang with the Chargers in a wire-too-wire race in the AFC West. Eleven wins are a realistic goal, and so is a win or two in the postseason. **SN**

*Lee Rasizer covers the Broncos for the Rocky Mountain News.*

## PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
QB	■ Jay Cutler ● Patrick Ramsey	LE	● Ebenezer Ekuban ● Tim Crowder
FB	● Cecil Sapp ● Kyle Johnson	LT	● Marcus Thomas □ Antwon Burton
RB	■ Travis Henry ● Mike Bell	RT	■ Gerard Warren ● Alvin McKinley
WR	● Brandon Marshall ● Rod Smith	RE	■ Elvis Dumervil ● Jarvis Moss
WR	▲ Javon Walker ● Brandon Stokley	SLB	● Warrick Holdman ● D.D. Lewis
TE	■ Daniel Graham ■ Tony Scheffler	MLB	■ D.J. Williams ● Nate Webster
LT	■ Matt Lepsis ● Ryan Harris	WLB	■ Ian Gold □ Louis Green
LG	■ Ben Hamilton □ Chris Myers	LCB	▲ Champ Bailey ● Karl Paymah
C	■ Tom Nalen □ Chris Myers	SS	● Nick Ferguson ● Curome Cox
RG	● Chris Kuper ● Montrae Holland	FS	■ John Lynch □ Hamza Abdullah
RT	● Erik Pears ● Adam Meadows	RCB	■ Dre' Bly ● Dominique Foxworth

### SPECIALISTS

K	▲ Jason Elam	KR	□ Domenik Hixon
P	■ Todd Sauerbrun	PR	□ Domenik Hixon
		LS	■ Mike Leach

▲ Elite ■ Solid ● Adequate □ Fringe

Depth charts updated weekly at [sportingnews.com](http://sportingnews.com)



## BRONCOS ROSTER

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL exp.	College	How acq.	2006 GP/GS
QUARTERBACKS							
6	Jay Cutler	6-3/233	4/29/83	2	Vanderbilt	D1/06	5/5
4	Darrell Hackney	6-0/240	8/7/83	2	UAB	FA/07	0/0
5	Preston Parsons	6-4/235	2/19/79	4	Northern Arizona	FA/06	0/0
8	Patrick Ramsey	6-2/223	2/14/79	6	Tulane	FA/07	1/0
RUNNING BACKS							
20	Mike Bell	6-0/215	4/23/83	2	Arizona	FA/06	15/3
33	Thump Belton (FB)	6-0/232	6/1/81	4	Syracuse	FA/06	0/0
34	Troy Fleming (FB)	6-0/245	10/1/80	4	Tennessee	FA/07	0/0
20	Travis Henry	5-9/215	10/29/78	7	Tennessee	FA/07	14/13
39	Kyle Johnson (FB)	6-0/242	12/15/78	5	Syracuse	FA/03	14/7
37	Cecil Sapp (FB)	5-11/229	12/23/78	5	Colorado State	FA/03	11/1
26	Paul Smith (FB)	5-11/237	1/31/78	8	Texas-El Paso	FA/07	10/3
RECEIVERS							
82	Stephen Alexander (TE)	6-4/250	11/7/75	10	Oklahoma	FA/05	16/14
19	Brian Clark	6-2/204	12/26/83	2	N.C. State	FA/06	6/0
	Daniel Graham (TE)	6-3/257	11/16/78	6	Colorado	FA/07	12/11
12	Domenik Hixon	6-2/185	10/8/84	2	Akron	D4c/06	0/0
89	Nate Jackson (TE)	6-3/235	6/4/79	5	Menlo	T-SF/03	11/0
87	David Kircus	6-2/192	2/19/80	4	Grand Valley State	FA/06	16/0
83	Mike Leach (TE/LS)	6-2/245	10/18/76	8	William & Mary	FA/02	16/0
15	Brandon Marshall	6-4/228	3/23/84	2	Central Florida	D4a/06	15/1
11	Quincy Morgan	6-1/215	9/23/77	7	Kansas State	FA/06	7/0
85	Chad Mustard (TE)	6-6/277	10/8/77	4	North Dakota	FA/06	12/4
88	Tony Scheffler (TE)	6-5/250	2/15/83	2	Western Michigan	D2/06	13/5
80	Rod Smith	6-0/200	5/15/70	13	Missouri Southern	FA/94	16/16
14	Brandon Stokley	5-11/197	6/23/76	9	Louisiana-Lafayette	FA/03	4/1
13	David Terrell	6-3/212	3/13/79	7	Michigan	FA/07	1/0
84	Javon Walker	6-3/209	10/14/78	6	Florida State	T-GB/06	16/16
OFFENSIVE LINEMEN							
50	Ben Hamilton (G/C)	6-4/283	8/18/77	7	Minnesota	D4a/01	16/16
	Ryan Harris (T)	6-5/292	3/11/85	R	Notre Dame	D3/07	—
70	Montrae Holland (G)	6-2/322	5/21/80	5	Florida State	FA/07	8/0
73	Chris Kuper (G)	6-4/305	12/19/82	2	North Dakota	D5/06	0/0
78	Matt Lepsis (T)	6-4/290	1/13/74	11	Colorado	FA/97	6/6
75	Adam Meadows (T)	6-5/290	1/25/74	9	Georgia	FA/06	3/3
62	Chris Myers (G/C)	6-5/301	9/15/81	3	Miami	D6/05	16/0
66	Tom Nalen (C)	6-3/286	5/13/71	14	Boston College	D7c/94	16/16
64	Erik Pears (T)	6-8/305	6/25/82	2	Colorado State	FA/05	16/10
69	Jacob Rogers (T)	6-6/312	8/7/81	4	USC	FA/07	0/0
DEFENSIVE LINEMEN							
93	Antwon Burton (T)	6-2/315	7/11/83	2	Temple	FA/06	1/0
	Tim Crowder (E)	6-4/270	6/30/85	R	Texas	D2/07	—
92	Elvis Dumervil (E)	5-11/250	1/19/84	2	Louisville	D4b/06	13/0
91	Ebenezer Ekuban (E)	6-4/275	5/29/76	9	North Carolina	T-Cle/05	15/15
60	John Engelberger (E)	6-4/252	10/18/76	8	Virginia Tech	T-SF/05	16/1
94	Amon Gordon (T)	6-2/319	10/13/81	4	Stanford	W-Cle/06	0/0
98	Carlos Hall (E)	6-4/259	1/16/79	6	Arkansas	FA/07	0/0
76	Kenard Lang (E)	6-3/264	1/31/75	11	Miami	FA/06	16/16
99	Alvin McKinley (E)	6-3/294	6/9/78	8	Mississippi State	FA/01	14/14
	Jarvis Moss (E)	6-6/251	8/3/84	R	Florida	D1/07	—
90	Kenny Peterson (E)	6-3/285	11/21/78	5	Ohio State	FA/06	3/0
	Marcus Thomas (T)	6-3/296	9/23/85	R	Florida	D4/07	—
97	Demetris Veal (T)	6-2/288	8/11/81	5	Tennessee	FA/04	16/1
61	Gerard Warren (T)	6-4/325	7/25/78	7	Florida	T-Cle/05	15/15
LINEBACKERS							
51	Keith Burns	6-2/235	5/16/72	14	Oklahoma State	FA/05	15/0
52	Ian Gold	6-0/223	8/23/78	8	Michigan	FA/05	15/15
53	Louis Green	6-3/228	9/23/79	4	Alcorn State	FA/03	16/0
	Warrick Holdman	6-1/235	11/22/75	9	Texas A&M	FA/07	16/16
57	T.J. Hollowell	6-0/235	4/8/81	5	Nebraska	FA/06	0/0
	D.D. Lewis	6-1/241	1/8/79	6	Texas	FA/07	5/1
51	Eddie Moore	6-1/235	7/5/80	5	Tennessee	FA/07	0/0
58	Nate Webster	6-0/235	11/29/77	8	Miami	FA/06	3/2
55	D.J. Williams	6-1/242	7/20/82	4	Miami	D1/04	16/15
DEFENSIVE BACKS							
21	Hamza Abdullah (S)	6-2/216	8/20/83	3	Washington State	FA/05	11/0
32	Dre' Bly (CB)	5-9/185	5/22/77	9	North Carolina	T-De/07	16/16
24	Champ Bailey (CB)	6-0/192	6/22/78	9	Georgia	T-Was/04	16/16
42	Sam Brandon (S)	6-2/200	7/5/79	6	UNLV	D4/02	8/0
38	Steve Cargile (S)	6-2/210	6/2/82	3	Columbia	FA/06	3/0
40	Curome Cox (S)	6-1/204	2/28/81	3	Maryland	FA/04	16/4
25	Nick Ferguson (S)	5-11/201	11/27/74	8	Georgia Tech	FA/03	10/10
22	Dominique Foxworth (CB)	5-11/180	3/27/83	3	Maryland	D3b/05	16/5
31	Quentin Harris (S)	6-1/213	1/26/77	6	Syracuse	FA/06	6/0
36	Eric Hill (CB)	6-0/190	5/22/80	2	Colorado State	FA/07	0/0
47	John Lynch (S)	6-2/220	9/25/71	15	Stanford	FA/04	16/16
41	Karl Paymah (CB)	6-0/204	11/29/82	3	Washington State	D3a/05	16/0
28	Jeff Shoate (CB)	5-10/180	3/23-81	4	San Diego State	D5/04	0/0
SPECIALISTS							
1	Jason Elam (K)	5-11/200	3/8/70	15	Hawaii	D3b/93	16/0
3	Paul Ernster (P)	6-0/217	1/26/82	3	Northern Arizona	D7/05	16/0
	Todd Sauerbrun (P)	5-10/215	1/4/73	13	West Virginia	FA/07	2/0

Abbreviations: D1-draft pick, first round; W-claimed on waivers; T-obtained in trade; FA-free-agent acquisition.

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# TEXANS

**With a little boost on both sides of the ball, the Texans finally might get on track for success**

**SN PICK** 4th, AFC South (7-9)

By MEGAN MANFULL

The iconic names Texans fans were most familiar with are gone. It's out with the old and in with the new—and team officials are betting the new names will produce unfamiliar results.

By cutting ties with quarterback David Carr and running back Domanick Williams (formerly Davis), the franchise tried to separate itself from its first five seasons, which were marred by poor draft choices, insufficient pass protection and losing records.

With the addition of an established running back in Ahman Green and a fresh, young quarterback in Matt Schaub, the Texans hope to bring consistency to an offense that has sorely lacked it.

If both newcomers come through and the defense finally generates a significant pass rush, the Texans could take a run at .500 after going 6-10 last season. But the problem that won't go away—left tackle—could put a damper on the positive vibes.

## OFFENSE

Mike Sherman has been promoted to coordinator, but little will actually change. There is no doubt coach Gary Kubiak remains in charge of the offense. With Green in tow, the Texans will try to build around an improved running game. If they run the ball with consistency and win the time of possession battle, it will open up plays downfield in the passing game.

**Quarterbacks**—Schaub comes with high expectations for a player who has started only two games in his three-year NFL career. The team hopes to establish a ground game and thereby take some pressure off Schaub's shoulders.

Schaub's greatest strengths are his presence in the pocket and his decision-making. The Texans like their quarterbacks to move around a lot, but Schaub isn't a great runner, so he won't be used on rollouts as often as Carr was.

Sage Rosenfels, who played extremely well in limited action last season, is a quality backup who fits well in this system. He has great pocket presence and

## SCHEDULE

All times Eastern

Sept. 9	KANSAS CITY	1:00
Sept. 16	at Carolina	1:00
Sept. 23	INDIANAPOLIS	1:00
Sept. 30	at Atlanta	1:00
Oct. 7	MIAMI	1:00
Oct. 14	at Jacksonville	1:00
Oct. 21	TENNESSEE	1:00
Oct. 28	at San Diego	4:05
Nov. 4	at Oakland	4:15
Nov. 11	Open date	
Nov. 18	NEW ORLEANS	1:00
Nov. 25	at Cleveland	1:00
Dec. 2	at Tennessee	1:00
Dec. 9	TAMPA BAY	1:00
Dec. 13	DENVER†	8:15
Dec. 23	at Indianapolis	1:00
Dec. 30	JACKSONVILLE	1:00

Strength of schedule: T-14th

†Thursday

Analysis of every Texans game:  
[sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom](http://sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom)

## REGULAR-SEASON WINS



Schaub



does a good job of finding open receivers.

Bradlee Van Pelt, the No. 3 quarterback, knows the system after playing for Kubiak in Denver. **GRADE: C**

**Running backs**—The success of the offense will hinge on the productivity of the running game, which is expected to be much improved.

Though Green is 30, he still may have one or two good seasons left in him. He's a good fit for the Texans' zone-blocking scheme, which requires running backs to make one cut and get through the hole.

The Texans are trying to steer clear of the committee approach they used last season. Green will receive the bulk of the carries, and top backup Ron Dayne will be used primarily in short-yardage and goal-line situations. Dayne is big (5-10, 245) and difficult to tackle. He lacks speed but keeps his legs churning after contact and finishes runs with power.

There will be an intense competition among Samkon Gado, Wali Lundy and Chris Taylor for the No. 3 job. Lundy has the edge going into training camp because of his hands and experience, but Taylor could be the surprise winner. A great power runner, he's a better fit for the scheme than Gado or Lundy.

The running backs will benefit from the return of fullback Vonta Leach, whose work as a blocker gave the ground game a tremendous boost in the final month of last season. **GRADE: B-**

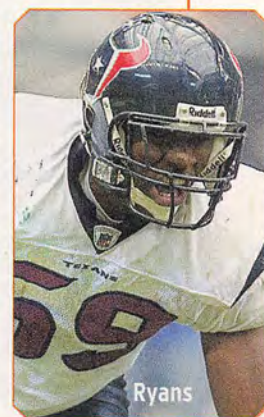
**Receivers**—Kubiak and Sherman are determined to showcase the team's best player—wide receiver Andre Johnson—as much as possible. They want to move Johnson around and use him on a variety of routes to confuse defenses. His hands are his greatest asset; he has an innate ability to make difficult catches.

Of course, if Johnson is the focal point, defenses

## SCOUT TAKES

### A scout from another team sizes up the Texans

**Matt Schaub** will be an upgrade just because he'll know what to do with the ball. He's probably more instinctive than **David Carr**. But he's not going to be very creative, and he'll need time to go through his progressions. So they'll need to protect him—and that's a big "if." ... Physically, **Mario Williams** has a chance to be a dominating defensive end. You can see flashes of it—he can win with speed and he can win with power—but he seems to be kind of lost out there at times. He doesn't always play with great instinct or effort. ... I thought **Ahman Green** ran OK last year. He's still quick to the hole and he's going to run hard, but I don't know how much he has left. I think he's pretty much close to the end. ... **DeMeco Ryans** played well as a rookie last year. He's not a great instinctive guy, but he's athletic, he can run and he'll hit you.



Ryans

ROBERT SEALE / SN ARCHIVES

JAY DROWNS / SN



will key on stopping him—a strategy that often worked last season. Kubiak is confident Kevin Walter will provide the legitimate playmaking No. 2 receiver the team has sorely lacked. Walter is a sure route runner with good speed and great hands. However, he averaged only 9.4 yards per catch last year and has only one touchdown catch in his first four years.

The only thing that could keep Walter from winning the No. 2 job is if a player such as rookie Jacoby Jones emerges quickly. Jones has good size (6-2, 210) and the speed to separate. But he is coming from the Division II ranks and may be in for a big adjustment.

More likely, Jones and Jerome Mathis will be the top candidates to be the third receiver. Mathis is a playmaker with amazing speed but could be in danger of being cut if he can't stay healthy.

Starting tight end Owen Daniels can stretch defenses with his ability to get downfield and catch the ball over the middle. Daniels is a solid blocker, but the team prefers to run behind backup Mark Bruener, who's tremendous in that area. Jeb Putzier will be involved when the team uses two-tight ends sets in passing situations. **GRADE: C+**

**Line**—The Texans enter their sixth season with the usual major question mark at left tackle. Charles Spencer showed promise early in his rookie season before being sidelined with a major knee injury. It's only 50-50 that Spencer will return in time for the opener.

The team re-signed Ephraim Salaam and added free agent Jordan Black as backups. Salaam, 31, is a tenacious competitor who played well as Spencer's replacement last season, but he can get beat by young, athletic ends and isn't a long-term answer. Black, 27, has more upside, but the Chiefs weren't enthralled by his play at left tackle last season.

The other linemen—center Mike Flanagan, right tackle Eric Winston, right guard Fred Weary and left guard Chester Pitts—all started games for the team last season. With a year in the zone-blocking scheme under their belts, they likely will be more effective this season. As a whole, the line is strongest in the running game and hopes to cut down the sacks allowed

## SCOUTING REPORTS: OFFENSE

### ↑ Matt Schaub, QB

**Strengths:** Has a quick release and shows good footwork, poise and accuracy. Can throw with touch. Big, and can get outside and throw on the run.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal arm strength, elusiveness and decision-making ability. Doesn't buy many second chances or protect the ball adequately.

**Bottom line:** The Texans think Schaub is the player who can carry them to respectability. With his accuracy, leadership and intelligence, he will allow the team to have a more versatile passing attack. **Grade: 7.0**

### ↓ Ahman Green, RB

**Strengths:** Explodes to the hole and runs with good body lean. Rarely takes a clean hit. A good north-south runner with nice straight-line speed.

**Weaknesses:** Has average hands and will fight the ball at times. Has had fumbling issues. Durability has been an issue in recent seasons.

**Bottom line:** Even though his best days are behind him, Green still can be an effective starter. If the Texans shift some of Green's load to backup Ron Dayne, Green will stay fresh enough to focus on off-tackle runs that keep him in space. **Grade: 7.1**

### ↓ Vonta Leach, FB

**Strengths:** A powerful straight-line blocker. Rolls his hips in the hole and keeps his feet moving after contact. Has decent hands and is an adequate receiver.

**Weaknesses:** Must be more consistent in all aspects of his game. Not particularly athletic; runs stiff at times.

**Bottom line:** Leach is a smash-mouth player who will be an important lead blocker for Green. He also will be used as a receiver out of the backfield in coach Gary Kubiak's spread attack. **Grade: 6.0**

### ↑ Andre Johnson, WR

**Strengths:** Athletic and explosive, with an excellent burst off the line. Has exceptional body control and ball skills; capable of making acrobatic catches outside his frame. Has the size and strength to rip the ball away from defenders. Can take a hit and has a good stiff-arm.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to improve his concentration. Must finish blocks with greater consistency.

**Bottom line:** Johnson is the best play-

er on the Texans' offense. With improved balance on offense and a new quarterback, he seems poised for another great year. **Grade: 8.6**

### Kevin Walter, WR

**Strengths:** Has good size and is strong off the line. Runs solid routes. Has improved his hands and concentration.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks deep speed and quick feet. Still is raw and struggles to decipher coverages.

**Bottom line:** Walter has been handed the No. 2 starting spot, and the Texans are counting on him to take some heat off Andre Johnson. Walter has the physical tools to succeed. **Grade: 6.5**

### ↑ Owen Daniels, TE

**Strengths:** Has good speed and nice hands. Tough enough to go over the middle and can make difficult catches. Finds open spots in zones. Has improved as a route runner. Can be effective blocking on the edge.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal size. Injury history is a concern. Struggles to match up physically at the point of attack on inside runs. Doesn't consistently get good separation off the line. **Bottom line:** Daniels' receiving skills, athleticism and understanding of coverage make up for his lack of physical tools. As long as he stays healthy, he will continue to have success in the Texans' offense. **Grade: 6.5**

### ↑ Eric Winston, T

**Strengths:** Plays with balance and has great body control. Shows rare athleticism. Physical, and plays with a mean streak. Takes good angles and consistently hits moving targets. Seldom gets beat around the corner by pass rushers. Moves well laterally. **Weaknesses:** Must get stronger and add bulk. Lacks explosiveness and leg drive. Must use his hands better in pass protection and play with better leverage.

**Bottom line:** Winston's outstanding athleticism makes him a great fit for the Texans' scheme. He will continue to improve with experience. **Grade: 7.8**

### ↓ Charles Spencer, T

**Strengths:** Has good size, explosiveness and athleticism. Gets to the second level quickly. Shows good footwork and extends his arms well in pass protection. Delivers a powerful initial blow. Can play in tight quarters

## FANTASY SOURCE PICKS

**STUD**  
WR Andre Johnson

**SLEEPER**  
QB Matt Schaub

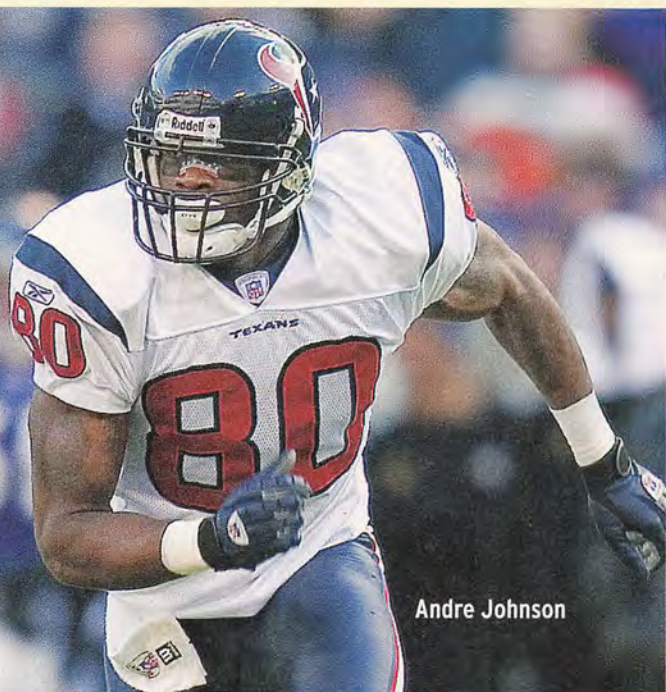
**STUMBLER**  
Defense/special teams

**INJURY RISK**  
RB Ahman Green

**DRAFT-DAY BARGAIN**  
RB Ron Dayne

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Players are graded by War Room scouts on a 1-10 scale.  
\*Rookies (not graded)



Andre Johnson

ALBERT DICKSON / SN

and in the open field. Stronger as a run blocker.

**Weaknesses:** Suffered a major leg injury last season, which makes him a big question mark in 2007. Not as strong against the pass as the run. Lacks experience.

**Bottom line:** A former defensive lineman, Spencer has excelled in his transition to offense, but his leg problem could jeopardize his 2007 season.

**Grade:** 7.0

### Chester Pitts, G

**Strengths:** Has good size to match up inside, where he engulfs defenders and can wear down opponents. A mauling run blocker who can be effective at the point of attack. Has excellent initial punch and good quickness in a short area. Anchors well against bull rushers.

**Weaknesses:** Footwork often is sloppy; will sometimes whiff on blocks off the snap. Consistently holds or tackles linebackers at the second level. Needs to improve his awareness of stunts.

**Bottom line:** Pitts' athletic ability makes him a perfect fit for the zone-blocking scheme. He improved a lot in 2006 and figures to be a solid starter for the foreseeable future.

**Grade:** 6.5

### Fred Weary, G

**Strengths:** Athletic, with good lateral

mobility and range. Has nice quickness off the snap and in getting to the second level. Delivers a good initial pop.

**Weaknesses:** Doesn't consistently take good angles and plays too high at times. Will miss assignments. Has only adequate recovery quickness.

**Bottom line:** Weary still needs to be more consistent with his steps and play with better leverage, but he is a solid starter in the Texans' scheme.

**Grade:** 6.1

### ↓ Mike Flanagan, C

**Strengths:** Intelligent, and moves well. Plays with great balance and pulls effectively. Reaches linebackers with ease and sustains his blocks. Uses his hands well and takes good angles. Handles presnap adjustments and rarely makes mistakes. Excels at picking up stunts and blitzes.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal strength and has some trouble with big defenders in the gap or over his nose. Doesn't get much movement. Doesn't always stop explosive one-gap penetrators. Has durability issues.

**Bottom line:** Flanagan's veteran experience in the middle of the line has made a struggling unit better, but he must stay healthy after missing seven games in 2006. **Grade:** 7.4

**KEY:** ↑ Ascending ↓ Descending

## INSIDERS POLL

### Matt Schaub will:

Make steady progress and guide the Texans to six or seven wins

18

Take over where David Carr left off: take tons of sacks, produce five or fewer wins

Throw 20-plus TD passes and lead the Texans to their first winning record

6 8

Based on a poll of SN's 32 team correspondents

## BOLD PREDICTIONS

**1** Ahman Green will continue the trend of 30-somethings racking up yards. He'll rush for 1,000 in his first year with the team.

**2** CB Dunta Robinson will have the breakout season everyone has been waiting for. He will top his rookie total of six interceptions and earn his first trip to the Pro Bowl.

**3** The Texans will falter in big games. The players won't take matchups against the Titans and Saints as personally as the administration. But QB Vince Young and RB Reggie Bush will have plenty of motivation for Houston and will lead their teams to wins.

total by 10 to 15 after allowing 43 a year ago. This unit still has a lot of growing to do and that maturity could determine whether this team moves forward this season.

Backup Steve McKinney battled injuries much of last season but provided a tremendous boost when he stepped in as the starting center the last two games. In addition to being the top backup at center, McKinney will play in a three-man rotation with Weary and Pitts at guard.

Rookie Kasey Studdard will make it hard for the team to keep him off the field. He could rotate in at guard or even step in as a starter if injuries strike. Rookie tackle Brandon Frye has a lot of speed, which suits the scheme well, but may need a season or two to develop. **GRADE: C-**

### DEFENSE

The Texans have high hopes for a defense that returns middle linebacker DeMeco Ryans, last year's NFL defensive rookie of the year, and right end Mario Williams, the top pick in last year's draft who was dinged up a big chunk of last season. Coordinator Richard Smith's main focus will be to create a more effective pass rush, which would in turn help the defensive backs make plays. Smith likes aggressive game plans, but injuries thwarted the productivity of the line last season. Expect better things in his second year in charge.

**Line—**The Texans hope their young players—especially Williams—will develop rapidly under new line coach Jethro Franklin. They will rely primarily on the front four to get to the

quarterback. And with Williams finally expected to be fully healthy and first-round pick Amobi Okoye ready to provide solid inside pressure, they might succeed with that strategy.

Left end Anthony Weaver provides leadership and consistency. He has a good feel for the game, though he's not a great pass rusher. Williams' development was slowed last year by a foot injury, but the team is counting on him to make big strides in his second season. He has the potential to double his sack total from last season (4½).

Okoye, who turns 20 a month before training camp opens, will be a key at tackle. He will have to adjust to the speed of the NFL and improve his all-around skills, but he gives the team a much-needed inside pass-rush threat. If he diverts double-team attention from Williams and gets in the face of quarterbacks, the defense could make big strides.

Anthony Maddox and Travis Johnson will compete for the other tackle job. Despite being somewhat raw, Maddox developed into the team's top tackle last season after being signed off the practice squad in October. He has good instincts and is quick to the ball. Johnson's strength is stopping the run, but he must play with more consistency and improve his ability to get off the ball.

End Jason Babin returns as the primary situational pass rusher. After a slow start, he had five sacks in 2006. N.D. Kalu's versatility—he can play inside or out—makes him valuable. Backup tackles Thomas Johnson and Jeff Zgonina, a free-agent pickup, are efficient run stoppers. **GRADE: C**

**Linebackers**—Linebackers coach Johnny Holland did an outstanding job with his group last season, and they could be even better after the team signed a couple of free agents who add speed and depth.

Ryans is the star of the group. He has great vision and sets up the rest of the defense from the middle spot. Though Ryans is the best pass rusher among the linebackers, he'll continue to be used mostly in run-stopping situations because the team prefers to get pressure from the front four.

Free-agent pickup Danny Clark gives the Texans a quality player with experience to back up Ryans. Clark is not a pass rusher but is strong against the run.

Shawn Barber, another free-agent addition, is fast and experienced and fits the system. He is expected to push incumbent

## SCOUTING REPORTS: DEFENSE

### ↑ Mario Williams, E

**Strengths:** Has outstanding size and athleticism. Has a nose for the ball, and changes direction quickly to chase down plays. Quick off the snap, with good footwork. Consistently turns the corner as a pass rusher. Diagnoses plays well; can be an equally dominant playmaker against the run or pass. Delivers big hits.

**Weaknesses:** Must improve at gaining separation from blockers. Needs to show a more consistent effort. Sometimes plays too upright. Must improve his technique. Tends to run around blocks.

**Bottom line:** Though he started from Day 1 as a rookie, Williams was hampered by injuries and didn't have the pass-rush impact the Texans had hoped for. But with continued improvement, Williams has the physical tools to be an all-time great. **Grade: 7.8**

### Anthony Weaver, E

**Strengths:** Has a solid combination of size and quickness. Shows the quickness to come off the ball and win his gap. Uses his hands well to swat the ball away at the line. Can split double-team blocks. Plays with good leverage.

**Weaknesses:** Not a physical hitter or tackler. Doesn't show a lot of big-play ability or consistently drive opponents backward. Not a natural pass rusher at the position.

**Bottom line:** Weaver isn't flashy, but he understands his role and makes the plays he's supposed to make. **Grade: 7.6**

### Anthony Maddox, T

**Strengths:** Has explosive quickness off the ball and works to get to the ball. Can make plays down the line with hustle.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to improve his strength to become more than a situational inside player.

**Bottom line:** Maddox has a lot of work to do to improve his strength and reactions, but he was a surprise contributor last season and has raw talent to develop. **Grade: 5.9**

### \*Amobi Okoye, T

**Strengths:** Penetrates the backfield consistently to blow up plays. Strong enough to clog the hole, shed blocks and make tackles. Shows unusual strength, quickness and explosiveness

as a pass rusher.

**Weaknesses:** Occasionally takes a misstep or stands flat-footed when not recognizing the play. Lacks polish.

**Bottom line:** Okoye will step in right away as a starter for the Texans. He will be only 20 this season and has potential to develop into one of the league's top tackles.

### ↑ DeMeco Ryans, LB

**Strengths:** Plays with great technique, instincts and quickness. Moves well laterally and sheds blocks. Takes good angles to the ball. Doesn't overpursue. A reliable open-field tackler. Can be effective on blitzes. Quick enough to cover tight ends and running backs near the line and in underneath zone coverage. Seldom gets caught out of position.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal size and strength. Doesn't have enough speed to thrive in coverage.

**Bottom line:** Ryans is an instinctive 'backer with a nose for the ball—and he seldom makes mistakes. He will continue to improve as the Texans upgrade the players around him. **Grade: 8.1**

### Morlon Greenwood, LB

**Strengths:** Has an explosive first step and can make plays in the backfield. Takes good angles to the ball. Has sideline-to-sideline range and excels in pursuit. Plays under control in space and doesn't miss many open-field tackles.

**Weaknesses:** Not a physical run stuffer; lacks great lower-body strength. Doesn't use his hands well. Takes too long to shed blocks and avoids taking on blockers.

**Bottom line:** Greenwood makes plays by making quick reads and being in position. His quick first step allows him to beat the blocker to the spot in most cases. **Grade: 7.6**

### Shantee Orr, LB

**Strengths:** An explosive upfield player with good instincts. Always around the ball. Anticipates snap counts and locates the ball quickly after penetrating the line. Disrupts plays in the backfield. Has the lateral mobility to slip blocks. Tackles well in the open field.

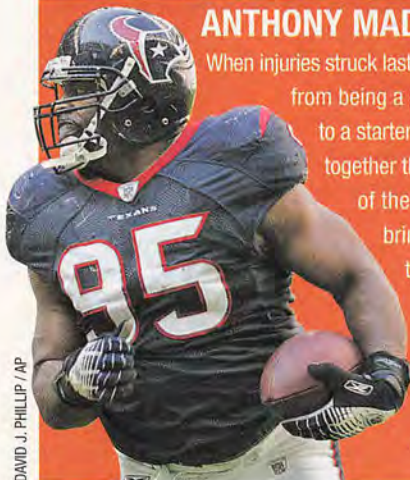
**Weaknesses:** Can't handle most running backs and tight ends in man coverage. Undersized.

**Bottom line:** Orr has outstanding pass-

## SECRET WEAPON

### ANTHONY MADDOX, DT

When injuries struck last season, Maddox went from being a practice squad player to a starter and ended up putting together the best season by any of the team's tackles. If he brings the same intensity and tenacity to the position this season, he will disrupt opponents. He's particularly effective against the run.



DAVID J. PHILLIP / AP

## KEY MOVES

### 2007 DRAFT PICKS

Rd.-Pick

GRADE **C****1-10 Amobi Okoye, DT, Louisville**

Needs to work on his all-around game but has great tools and upside.

**3-73 Jacoby Jones, WR, Lane**

A converted track star with good size and speed and a great attitude.

**4-123 Fred Bennett, CB, South Carolina**

Athletic corner with size. Will compete for the nickel back job.

**5-144 Brandon Harrison, S, Stanford**

Has imposing size but needs to be more physical.

**5-163 Brandon Frye, OT, Virginia Tech**

Has raw talent and 4.77 speed. Fits the zone-blocking system.

**6-183 Kasey Studdard, G, Texas**

A hard worker who could develop into a starter. Adds needed inside depth.

**7-218 Zach Diles, ILB, Kansas State**

A big hitter who adds depth and could help on special teams.

### VETERAN PLAYERS

**Additions:** LB Shawn Barber (FA/Eagles), OT Jordan Black (FA/Chiefs), LB Danny Clark (FA/Saints), WR Andre' Davis (FA/Bills), RB Ahman Green (FA/Packers), CB Jamar Fletcher (FA/Lions), QB Matt Schaub (trade/Falcons), DT Jeff Zgonina (FA/Dolphins).

**Losses:** QB David Carr (FA/Panthers), LB Antwan Peek (FA/Browns), WR Eric Moulds (FA), DL Seth Payne (FA), CB Lewis Sanders (FA/Falcons), OL Zach Wiegert (FA), RB Domanick Williams (FA), LB Kailele Wong (FA).

starter Shantee Orr for the strongside job. Orr struggled early last season to adapt to the 4-3 scheme and needs to improve his coverage skills. Clark also could be in the mix for the strongside job.

Weakside linebacker Morlon Greenwood embraced the new scheme to turn in one of his best seasons. A quality run stopper, he also has improved against the pass. **GRADE: B+**

**Secondary**—This unit needs to take significant strides this season, particularly in producing big plays. In three of the past five seasons, the Texans have ranked in the bottom five in the NFL in interceptions; last season they had only 11 picks.

All four starters—cornerbacks Dunta Robinson and Demarcus Faggins and safeties C.C. Brown and Glenn Earl—return. Robinson is one of the leaders on defense. He is fierce tackler with great speed. However, after making six interceptions in his rookie year, he has combined for three the past two. Faggins makes lots of plays in practice but hasn't been able to carry that over to games.

Jamar Fletcher has never been more than a spot starter in his six-year career but could battle Faggins for the job. Fletcher is a journeyman who lacks ideal size and athleticism but has some playmaking ability (he had three picks for the Lions last year). If he doesn't win the starting job, Fletcher will compete with rookie Fred Bennett at nickel back. Bennett, an aggressive man-to-man cover corner, comes with more questions but could develop into a solid starter.

Brown and Earl both are best suited to play strong safety, which means neither is suited to cover the deep middle or make plays on the ball. The two combined for two interceptions last season. It's possible cornerback Von Hutchins could shift to free safety, which he played in college, but he wouldn't be in the

rush ability; when used properly, he is very effective as a blitzer. **Grade: 7.0**

#### ↑Dunta Robinson, CB

**Strengths:** A quick learner. Plays with confidence and can bounce back from bad plays. Has excellent feel in both press coverage and off coverage. Has improved his coverage reads and has solid route awareness. Shows good hips and excellent quickness and change-of-direction skills.

**Weaknesses:** Still raw in some of his techniques. Sometimes guesses and gets out of position.

**Bottom line:** Robinson has developed into an upper-tier cornerback and can get even better. **Grade: 8.9**

#### Glenn Earl, S

**Strengths:** Smart and instinctive. Consistently positions himself in the right spot to make plays. Aggressive; acts as an extra linebacker when moving into the box.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to improve in all areas of coverage. Doesn't have the quickness to consistently match up in man coverage

**Bottom line:** Earl must improve in coverage and become an every-down player for the Texans' defense to get better. **Grade: 6.9**

#### ↓C.C. Brown, S

**Strengths:** Has adequate size. Effective close to the line on running plays.



Robinson

ROBERT SEALE / SN ARCHIVES

#### Demarcus Faggins, CB

**Strengths:** Can mirror receivers in short-to-intermediate coverage. A natural athlete who has good hips. Shows nice range when the ball is in the air.

**Weaknesses:** Can be slow to react in off coverage. Lacks size and isn't physical.

**Bottom line:** Faggins isn't an ideal starter, but he has put in his time and will compete with free-agent pickup Jamar Fletcher for the job. **Grade: 6.7**

Intense and relentless in pursuit. Times his hits well and punishes receivers in the middle of the field.

**Weaknesses:** Can be overaggressive; not consistent as a tackler. Doesn't move his hips well enough to turn and run quickly. Lacks man coverage skills to match up with tight ends and slot receivers.

**Bottom line:** Brown plays mean and is at his best when stationed closer to the line. He'll have to improve in coverage to remain an NFL starter. **Grade: 6.5**

starting mix in the short-term.

Rookie Brandon Harrison has the versatility to play anywhere in the defensive backfield and will try to carve a niche for himself in an increasingly crowded secondary. **GRADE: C-**

## SPECIAL TEAMS

Overall, the special teams units will be strong because coordinator Joe Marciano is one of the best in the league.

Neither punter Chad Stanley nor kicker Kris Brown is coming off his best season, but the team is hopeful both will rebound. Stanley needs to improve his performance on the road, and Brown must work on his overall consistency. He was 19-for-25 in field-goal attempts, which is subpar by today's standards.

## STADIUM/MEDIA

Reliant Stadium (71,054, grass)  
**Tickets:** 866-GO-TEXANS  
**Training camp:** Methodist Training Center, Houston; 832-667-2000  
**Radio:** KILT-AM (610)  
**Website:** houstontexans.com

Mathis has proved he can be a star kick returner, but if he doesn't answer significant durability and attitude questions, Dexter Wynn will handle kickoff duties as well as punts. He emerged as a solid return option last season. Long snapper Bryan Pittman remains one of the Texans' steadiest players. **GRADE: B-**

## BOTTOM LINE

Good things started to happen for the Texans at the end of Kubiak's first season, and they'll try to build on that improvement this year. How successful the team becomes, however, will depend on the effectiveness of the running game and the pass rush. If those two facets improve sufficiently and Schaub proves he can execute the offense, the Texans could be as good as 9-7.

But with an unsettled situation at left tackle and uncertainty at wideout after Johnson, 6-10 or 7-9 might be more realistic. **SN**

Megan Manfull covers the Texans for the Houston Chronicle.

## PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
QB	● Matt Schaub	LE	■ Anthony Weaver
	● Sage Rosenfels		● N.D. Kalu
FB	■ Vonta Leach	DT	● Anthony Maddox
	□ Cory Anderson		● Travis Johnson
RB	■ Ahman Green	DT	■ Amobi Okoye
	● Ron Dayne		● Jeff Zgonina
WR	▲ Andre Johnson	RE	■ Mario Williams
	● Jerome Mathis		● Jason Babin
WR	● Kevin Walter	SLB	■ Shantee Orr
	● Jacoby Jones		■ Shawn Barber
TE	■ Owen Daniels	MLB	▲ DeMeco Ryans
	● Mark Bruener		● Danny Clark
LT	● Charles Spencer	WLB	■ Morlon Greenwood
	● Jordan Black		● Danny Clark
LG	■ Chester Pitts	LCB	▲ Dunta Robinson
	□ Kasey Studdard		□ Fred Bennett
C	● Mike Flanagan	SS	● Glenn Earl
	□ Drew Hodgdon		● Michael Stone
RG	■ Fred Weary	FS	● C.C. Brown
	● Steve McKinney		□ Brandon Harrison
RT	● Eric Winston	RCB	● Demarcus Faggins
	● Ephraim Salaam		● Jamar Fletcher

## SPECIALISTS

K	■ Kris Brown	KR	■ Jerome Mathis
P	■ Chad Stanley	PR	■ Dexter Wynn
		LS	■ Bryan Pittman
▲ Elite ■ Solid ● Adequate □ Fringe			
Depth charts updated weekly at <a href="http://sportingnews.com">sportingnews.com</a>			



## TEXANS ROSTER

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL exp.	College	How acq.	2006 GP/GS
QUARTERBACKS							
18	Sage Rosenfels	6-4/222	3/6/78	7	Iowa State	FA/06	4/0
8	Matt Schaub	6-5/237	6/25/81	4	Virginia	D3/04	16/0
10	Bradlee Van Pelt	6-2/220	7/3/80	3	Colorado State	FA/06	0/0
RUNNING BACKS							
43	Jameel Cook (FB)	5-10/237	2/8/79	7	Illinois	FA/06	11/6
36	Ron Dayne	5-10/245	3/14/78	8	Wisconsin	FA/06	11/6
35	Samkon Gado	5-10/226	11/13/82	3	Liberty	T-GB/06	9/1
30	Ahman Green	6-0/218	2/16/77	10	Nebraska	FA/07	14/14
44	Vonta Leach (FB)	6-0/246	11/6/81	4	East Carolina	FA/04	12/5
33	Wali Lundy	5-10/214	9/8/83	2	Virginia	D6/06	14/8
27	Chris Taylor	5-11/220	11/7/83	2	Indiana	FA/06	4/0
RECEIVERS							
19	Charlie Adams	6-2/190	10/23/79	5	Hofstra	FA/04	0/0
14	David Anderson	5-10/192	7/28/83	2	Colorado State	D7/06	9/0
87	Mark Bruener (TE)	6-4/258	9/16/72	13	Washington	FA/04	15/4
81	Owen Daniels (TE)	6-4/253	11/9/82	2	Wisconsin	D4/06	14/12
11	Andre Davis	6-1/195	6/12/79	6	Virginia Tech	FA/07	16/1
83	Joel Dreessen (TE)	6-4/260	7/26/82	3	Colorado State	FA/07	0/0
80	Andre Johnson	6-3/219	7/11/81	5	Miami	D1/03	16/16
12	Jacoby Jones	6-2/210	7/11/84	R	Lane	D3/07	—
13	Jerome Mathis	5-11/191	7/26/83	3	Hampton	D4/05	2/0
88	Jeb Putzier (TE)	6-4/256	1/20/79	6	Boise State	FA/06	14/5
83	Kevin Walter	6-3/218	8/4/81	5	Eastern Michigan	FA/06	16/2
OFFENSIVE LINEMEN							
68	Brad Bedell (T)	6-4/318	2/12/77	6	Colorado	FA/06	9/0
72	Jordan Black (T)	6-5/310	1/28/80	5	Notre Dame	FA/07	16/15
58	Mike Flanagan (C)	6-5/301	11/10/73	12	UCLA	FA/06	9/9
	Brandon Frye (T)	6-4/302	1/23/83	R	Virginia Tech	D5b/07	—
57	Drew Hodgdon (C)	6-3/309	11/15/81	3	Arizona State	D5/05	7/5
62	Scott Jackson (G)	6-4/300	8/19/79	3	Brigham Young	FA/06	0/0
76	Steve McKinney (C)	6-4/302	10/15/75	10	Texas A&M	FA/02	16/6
48	Bryan Pittman (LS)	6-3/275	1/20/77	5	Washington	FA/03	16/0
69	Chester Pitts (G/T)	6-3/320	6/26/79	6	San Diego State	D2b/02	16/16
74	Ephraim Salaam (T)	6-7/295	6/19/76	10	San Diego State	FA/06	15/14
77	Charles Spencer (T)	6-4/352	3/17/82	2	Pittsburgh	D3a/06	2/2
64	Kasey Studdard (G)	6-2/303	7/1/84	R	Texas	D6/07	—
70	Fred Weary (G)	6-4/308	9/30/77	6	Tennessee	D3a/02	15/12
73	Eric Winston (T)	6-7/310	11/17/83	2	Miami	D3b/06	12/7
DEFENSIVE LINEMEN							
93	Jason Babin (E)	6-2/259	5/24/80	4	Western Michigan	D1b/04	15/3
79	Tim Bulman (T)	6-4/292	10/31/82	3	Boston College	FA/05	0/0
60	Earl Cochran (E)	6-5/284	4/19/81	3	Alabama State	FA/06	1/0
75	Lionel Dalton (T)	6-1/315	2/21/75	10	Eastern Michigan	FA/04	10/2
96	Thomas Johnson (T)	6-2/298	6/24/81	3	Midd. Tenn. St.	FA/06	11/3
99	Travis Johnson (T)	6-3/305	4/26/82	3	Florida State	D1/05	9/8
94	N.D. Kalu (E)	6-3/265	8/3/75	11	Rice	FA/06	15/3
78	Cedric Killings (T)	6-2/310	12/14/77	6	Carson-Newman	FA/06	4/0
95	Anthony Maddox (T)	6-1/295	11/22/78	4	Delta State	FA/06	12/9
97	Alfred Malone (E)	6-5/308	2/21/82	3	Troy	FA/05	2/0
91	Amobi Okoye (T)	6-2/302	6/10/87	R	Louisville	D1/07	—
98	Anthony Weaver (E)	6-3/280	7/28/80	6	Notre Dame	FA/06	15/15
90	Mario Williams (E)	6-7/295	1/31/85	2	N.C. State	D1/06	16/16
92	Jeff Zgonina (T)	6-2/285	5/24/70	15	Purdue	FA/03	14/2
LINEBACKERS							
50	Charlie Anderson	6-4/243	12/8/81	4	Mississippi	D6/04	13/0
51	Shawn Barber	6-2/240	1/14/75	10	Richmond	FA/06	13/1
55	Danny Clark	6-2/245	5/9/77	8	Illinois	FA/04	16/0
54	Zach Diles	6-0/240	6/11/85	R	Kansas State	D7/07	—
56	Morlon Greenwood	6-0/238	7/17/78	7	Syracuse	FA/05	16/16
53	Shantee Orr	6-0/250	5/28/81	5	Michigan	FA/03	16/11
51	DaShon Polk	6-2/240	3/13/77	8	Arizona	FA/04	10/0
96	Wali Rainer	6-2/240	4/19/77	9	Virginia	FA/06	0/0
59	DeMeco Ryans	6-2/236	7/28/84	2	Alabama	D2/06	16/16
DEFENSIVE BACKS							
28	Roc Alexander (CB)	5-10/186	9/23/81	4	Washington	FA/06	1/0
32	Fred Bennett (CB)	6-0/197	12/31/83	R	South Carolina	D4/07	—
24	C.C. Brown (S)	6-0/208	1/27/83	3	La-Lafayette	D6/05	15/15
39	Curry Burns (S)	6-0/216	2/12/81	4	Louisville	FA/06	2/0
26	Glenn Earl (S)	6-1/215	6/10/81	4	Notre Dame	D4/04	15/15
38	Demarcus Faggins (CB)	5-10/180	6/13/79	6	Kansas State	D6a/02	11/10
21	Jamar Fletcher (CB)	5-10/186	8/28/79	7	Wisconsin	FA/06	13/2
31	Brandon Harrison (S)	6-2/215	4/29/85	R	Stanford	D5a/07	—
29	Jason Horton (CB)	6-0/193	2/16/80	4	North Carolina A&T	FA/07	0/0
34	Von Hutchins (CB)	5-9/181	2/14/81	4	Mississippi	FA/07	3/0
20	Dexter McClellan (CB)	5-10/195	10/9/73	11	Clemson	FA/06	16/5
23	Dunta Robinson (CB)	5-10/174	4/11/82	4	South Carolina	D1/04	16/16
22	Jason Simmons (S)	5-9/199	3/30/76	10	Arizona State	FA/02	16/2
42	Michael Stone (S)	6-0/201	2/13/78	6	Memphis	FA/06	2/0
25	Dexter Wynn (CB)	5-9/177	2/25/81	4	Colorado State	W-Phi/06	15/0
SPECIALISTS							
3	Kris Brown (K)	5-11/205	12/23/76	9	Nebraska	FA/02	16/0
7	Chad Stanley (P)	6-3/205	1/29/76	9	Stephen F. Austin	FA/02	16/0

Abbreviations: D1-draft pick, first round; W-claimed on waivers; T-obtained in trade; FA-free-agent acquisition.



# COLTS

**There is one goal—to repeat as champs—and there are plenty of reasons to think it could happen**

**SN PICK** 1st, AFC South (13-3)

By MIKE CHAPPELL

**C**learly, this has not been a run-of-the-mill offseason for the Colts. Not with a trip to the White House and the ceremony to distribute the diamond-studded Super Bowl rings.

Normalcy will return as players report to Terre Haute, Ind., for the start of training camp. That's when the dazzling distractions that accompany a Super Bowl championship must give way to a message coach Tony Dungy will issue to his players: The

only way to win another title is to do what made the first one possible.

The offseason was not kind to the Colts' roster. Seven prominent players departed, including four who played significant roles in the drive to the win against Chicago in Super Bowl 41: linebacker Cato June, cornerbacks Jason David and Nick Harper and running back Dominic Rhodes. But the nucleus remains. That means opposing defenses must brace themselves for quarterback Peyton Manning, wide receivers Marvin Harrison and Reggie Wayne and running back Joseph Addai, who will carry the running load this season.

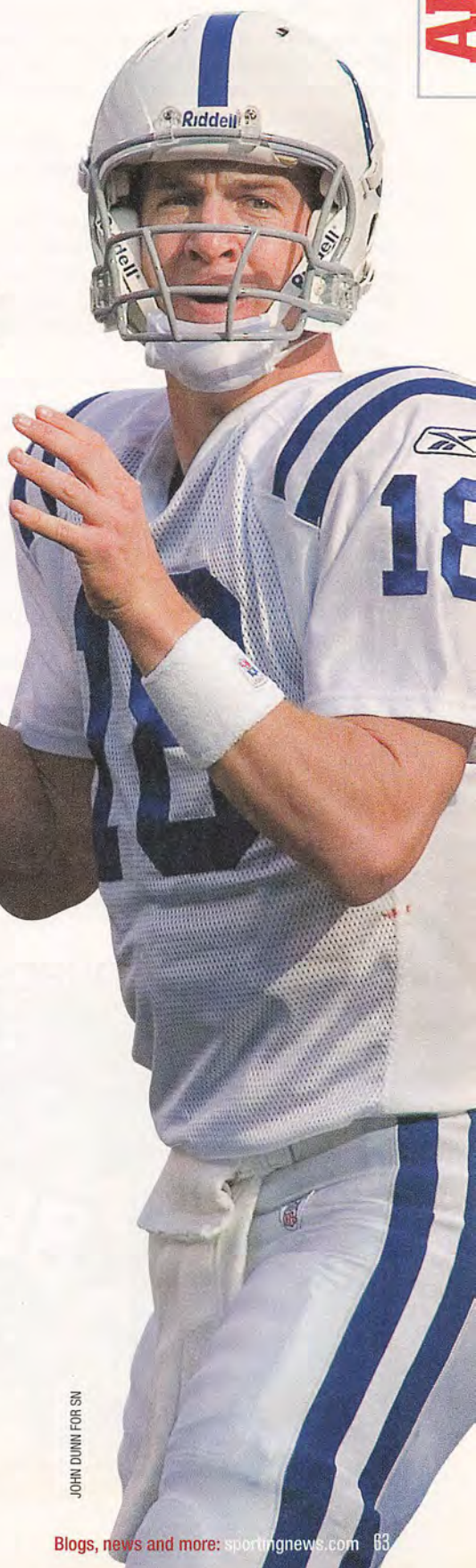
Opposing offenses again must deal with the bookend pass-rush threat of Dwight Freeney and Robert Mathis. But the Colts have plenty of questions to answer on defense.

## OFFENSE

The focus is on maximizing the available personnel and adapting to it. Few do it better than Tom Moore, who has been the mastermind behind one of the NFL's most vibrant attacks since 1998. More adjustments, subtle but significant, will occur after the departure of Brandon Stokley. No longer does Moore have a proven slot receiver, though first-round pick Anthony Gonzalez gives Moore the option of using a three-receiver set or his beloved two-tight end formation.

**Quarterbacks**—There is a method to the madness that precedes every snap taken by Manning. It's all about

Manning



JOHN DUNN FOR SN

## SCHEDULE

All times Eastern

Sept. 6	NEW ORLEANS†	8:30
Sept. 16	at Tennessee	1:00
Sept. 23	at Houston	1:00
Sept. 30	DENVER	4:15
Oct. 7	TAMPA BAY	4:05
Oct. 14	Open date	
Oct. 22	at Jacksonville*	8:30
Oct. 28	at Carolina	1:00
Nov. 4	NEW ENGLAND	4:15
Nov. 11	at San Diego	8:15
Nov. 18	KANSAS CITY	1:00
Nov. 22	at Atlanta†	8:15
Dec. 2	JACKSONVILLE	1:00
Dec. 9	at Baltimore	8:15
Dec. 16	at Oakland	4:05
Dec. 23	HOUSTON	1:00
Dec. 30	TENNESSEE	1:00

Strength of schedule: T-5th

\*Monday †Thursday

Analysis of every Colts game:

sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom

## REGULAR-SEASON WINS



reading defenses, adjusting blocking assignments and getting into a play that has a chance of succeeding. The effectiveness of the approach is rooted in the unwavering trust that exists between Manning and Moore.

Not only is Manning arguably the most indispensable player in the league, but he's the best at operating an offense that requires split-second decisions. More often than not, the decisions are good ones—Manning has thrown no more than 10 interceptions in each of the past four years.

Manning delivers the ball where it's supposed to go—as evidenced by his 64 percent career completion rate—and works in concert with his line to limit sacks.

Veteran backup Jim Sorgi remains a seldom-used insurance policy. He has a firm grasp of the offense and has played well with the No. 1 unit when given the opportunity, but he lacks great arm strength and occasionally takes too long to make decisions. The team added veteran John Navarre as a No. 3 option. **GRADE: A**

**Running backs**—In Moore's system, a running back not only must be a productive runner but he also must be a reliable option as a receiver and a viable part of the pass protection scheme.

With his ability to handle all three elements, Addai has been a perfect fit. Despite his size (5-11, 214), he runs with power and—most important—he excels at running the team's patented stretch play. He showed the necessary patience, and once he made his decision to cut, he accelerated impressively through the hole. After catching 40 passes during the regular season, Addai had 10 receptions in the Super Bowl. And he was consistently solid with his pass blocking.

With Rhodes' offseason departure to Oakland, Addai is the only back on the roster who has carried the ball during the regular season. The coaching staff is high on DeDe Dorsey, who has displayed quickness and the ability to catch the ball in practice. Kenton Keith, who was a 1,000-yard rusher in the Canadian Football League, also is in the mix.

The team has never valued the fullback position. In short-yardage situations a year ago, it turned to defensive tackles Darrell Reid and Dan Klecko as lead blockers. **GRADE: B**

## FANTASY SOURCE PICKS

**STUD**  
QB Peyton Manning

**ON THE RISE**  
RB Joseph Addai

**MR. RELIABLE**  
WR Marvin Harrison ▶

**TOP NEWCOMER**  
WR Anthony Gonzalez

**DON'T FORGET**  
K Adam Vinatieri



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## SCOUTING REPORTS: OFFENSE

### Peyton Manning, QB

**Strengths:** One of the smartest players in the NFL. Sees the entire field and knows when to audible out of bad plays. A solid leader who makes all the players around him better. An excellent technician who can make all the throws and is the game's best play-action quarterback. Release is extremely quick. Shows excellent accuracy and touch to all levels. Can fit the ball into tight spots and excels at hitting receivers in stride.

**Weaknesses:** Not a great athlete and isn't quick or fast. Will take sacks when rattled early and then will try to do too much. Supreme confidence also can be a negative at times.

**Bottom line:** Manning is one of the best to ever play the game. He's a smart field general who has vowed to be better in '07. **Grade: 9.8**

### ↑ Joseph Addai, RB

**Strengths:** A tough, decisive runner who attacks the hole and bounces off defenders. Has excellent footwork and body control. Shows good change-of-direction skills and can locate cutback lanes. At his best when bouncing runs outside. Has home run speed. An adequate blocker. A natural receiver with sure hands. Runs precise routes, recognizes coverage and gets open quickly.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal bulk and isn't a strong short-yardage option. Not elusive in the open field. Durability is a concern.

**Bottom line:** Addai was about as productive as you could hope any rookie would be, but he must get bigger and stronger to stay on the field and be a top-tier feature back. **Grade: 7.7**

### Marvin Harrison, WR

**Strengths:** Tough and durable. Still shows excellent quickness off the snap. Has outstanding hands and can make catches outside his frame. Has excellent body control. Can work through double-teams and make big plays. Will make catches in traffic. Knows how to set guys up and get out of breaks quickly.

**Weaknesses:** Can have trouble against press coverage because of his lack of size and strength. An average blocker. Sometimes avoids contact and goes out of bounds.

**Bottom line:** Harrison makes up for his lack of size and strength by being one

of the best route runners in the game and playing with a high level of concentration at all times. **Grade: 9.4**

### Reggie Wayne, WR

**Strengths:** Smooth athlete who plays with good power. Runs very good slant routes. Has outstanding hands and adjusts to the ball well. Has excellent body control and balance. Uses his size to create separation.

**Weaknesses:** Has average deep speed. Can be jammed at the line when he does not use his hands in his release. Lacks burst to leave the defender when the ball is in the air.

**Bottom line:** Wayne is a perfect fit as the No. 2 in the Colts' offense. He has gotten better each season. **Grade: 8.2**

### Dallas Clark, TE

**Strengths:** Has great hands for the position; shows excellent concentration to make plays in traffic. Plays fast and can separate against man coverage. A solid route runner who plays with toughness.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to improve as a blocker; often gets manhandled on the line. Has some durability concerns.

**Bottom line:** Clark provides a solid intermediate target for Manning. **Grade: 7.5**

### ↑ Ben Utecht, TE

**Strengths:** Has good hands and understands how to get open. Has above-average speed. Takes good angles to blocks.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks strength and can be overpowered at the point of attack.

**Bottom line:** Utecht is a reliable receiving option. Given Clark's durability issues, Utecht is a valuable backup for this team. **Grade: 6.1**

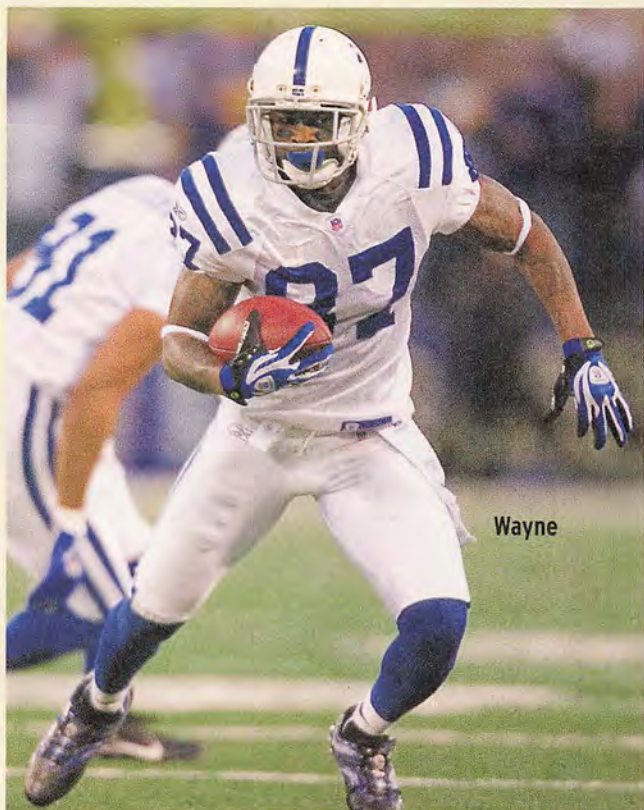
### ↑ Tarik Glenn, T

**Strengths:** Has an excellent combination of size, strength and athleticism. Has a nasty streak and finishes blocks in the running game. Has a strong two-arm extension in pass protection. Shows a solid initial punch and can anchor against a power rush.

**Weaknesses:** Tends to play high when tired. Sometimes is slow off the ball, which hinders his ability to make cut blocks. A little too inconsistent.

**Bottom line:** Glenn, a perennial Pro Bowl pick, continues to be a wall on Manning's blind side. **Grade: 8.7**

Players are graded by War Room scouts on a 1-10 scale.  
\*Rookies (not graded)



### Ryan Diem, T

**Strengths:** Drives his legs after contact, has excellent lower-body strength and can push the pile in the running game. Takes excellent angles to blocks and fights to sustain the block once in position.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal athleticism and lateral mobility. Struggles to redirect inside after starting outside and is vulnerable to double moves.

**Bottom line:** Diem's mass allows him to engulf undersized rushers, but he is far more effective in the running game. **Grade: 7.4**

### Ryan Lilja, G

**Strengths:** Plays hard and has good smarts and toughness. Has good initial and lateral quickness. Gets off the ball well and can adjust on the move.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal size and struggles to hold his ground against bigger bull rushers. Shows only adequate technique in pass protection.

**Bottom line:** Lilja is a young, athletic player who will continue to improve with experience. **Grade: 6.8**

### Jake Scott, G

**Strengths:** Tall, with nice potential to

bulk up. Has good feet. Quick off the snap and shows good lateral mobility and range, as well as nice balance.

**Weaknesses:** Very lean and lacks overall strength. Doesn't consistently get movement in the running game or anchor against bull rushers.

**Bottom line:** Scott is durable. He stepped into a starting role in 2005 and has not missed a game in two years. **Grade: 6.7**

### Jeff Saturday, C

**Strengths:** Displays sound technique in both run and pass blocking. Plays to the whistle with excellent toughness. Very durable. Smart and alert. Has excellent vision and awareness in pass protection.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks great strength; not overly powerful in his upper or lower body. Can have trouble against bigger tackles. Not an explosive run blocker.

**Bottom line:** Saturday is a self-made player who fits well in the Colts' schemes and consistently plays at a high level. **Grade: 7.3**

**KEY:** ↑ Ascending ↓ Descending

## INSIDERS POLL

Which scenario is most likely?

9

The Colts win back-to-back Lombardis

6

Peyton Manning gets hurt for the first time

17

The run defense reverts to regular-season form

0

Indy misses the playoffs for the first time in six years

Based on a poll of SN's 32 team correspondents

## BOLD PREDICTIONS

**1** There will be no sophomore jinx for Joseph Addai. He'll be the feature back this season, and more touches will result in his approaching 2,000 rushing and receiving yards.

**2** RE Dwight Freeney will not hit double figures in sacks. He'll remain the focal point of opponents' game plans, and Indy's poor run 'D' will compromise his ability to rush the passer.

**3** New season, new linebacker-on-the-spot. This season, it's Freddy Keiaho, a 2006 third-round pick. Keiaho will emerge as a solid weakside starter and ease the loss of June.

**Receivers**—The passing offense—which has ranked no lower than No. 6 in the league since Manning's arrival in '98—hinges on a blend of rhythm and timing. Manning is supremely confident his receivers will be at the right spot at the right time and typically hits them in stride, which maximizes their run-after-the-catch opportunities.

Harrison and Wayne work well in the system because of their ability to avoid contact at the line. When corners miss their jam attempts on Harrison, he can go deep on them in a blink. He has produced at least 10 touchdown catches in eight consecutive seasons, an NFL record.

The team took a major step toward complementing its dynamite duo by selecting Gonzalez with the last pick of the first round. With his speed and after-the-catch sizzle, Gonzalez has the skill set to be an ideal replacement for Stokley in the slot. The team further addressed its depth by re-signing veteran Aaron Moorehead, a solid contributor when called upon.

The tight ends are proven and prominent in the offense. Moore can flex the versatile Dallas Clark into the slot, where he presents downfield matchup problems for defenses. Clark has excellent hands, does a good job of getting down the seam and is a tough runner after the catch, but he has had durability problems. Ben Utecht and Bryan Fletcher are above-average backups who understand how to get open. **GRADE: A**

**Line**—The key words for this unit—one of the NFL's best for many years—are stability and versatility. The Colts do a great job of handling the constant audibles and adjustments required

in Moore's offense. Unlike other areas on the team, the line has experienced little change. The top eight linemen return, and guard Rick DeMulling is back after two years in Detroit.

Manning feels secure in knowing Pro Bowl left tackle Tarik Glenn will protect his blind side for the 10th straight season. Glenn (6-5, 332) continues to be light on his feet and extremely effective as both a run blocker and pass protector.

Center Jeff Saturday is the heart and soul of the line, and he handles the presnap adjustments. Guards Jake Scott and Ryan Lilja, along with top backup Dylan Gandy, possess the power to punch holes at the point of attack or pull ahead of Addai on stretch plays. That threesome becomes a solid quartet with the return of DeMulling, who excelled as a starter from 2002-04.

Ryan Diem is a powerful right tackle who is competent in run support and protection. If either Glenn or Diem goes down, Charlie Johnson, a 2006 sixth-round pick, is capable of stepping in. He played extensively in the Super Bowl when Diem was injured.

The team decided to look ahead by drafting Arkansas' Tony Ugoh in the second round. Ugoh likely will spend his rookie season at guard but is viewed as the eventual successor to Glenn, 31, who will be a free agent at the end of the season.

#### GRADE: A

### DEFENSE

Which is the Colts' real defense: the porous regular-season unit or the stingy playoff squad? No philosophical changes have been made, and it's imperative for players to be more sound in their assignments and execution. If the run defense reverts to last year's regular-season form, the team will struggle to repeat. A couple of things need to happen: 1) The play of the linebackers must be better; it was substandard much of last season; 2) Safety Bob Sanders, a Pro Bowl selection in '05, must stay healthy—he missed 12 games last season with a knee injury.

**Line**—Everything starts up front in Dungy's defense. The front four must hold its own against the run while getting pressure on the quarterback. Blitzing is kept to a minimum.

Work against the run was horrific at times last season, and the front four has to share the blame. Too often, players were too focused on rushing the quarterback and vacated their lanes, which allowed running backs to attack the back seven with a full head of steam.

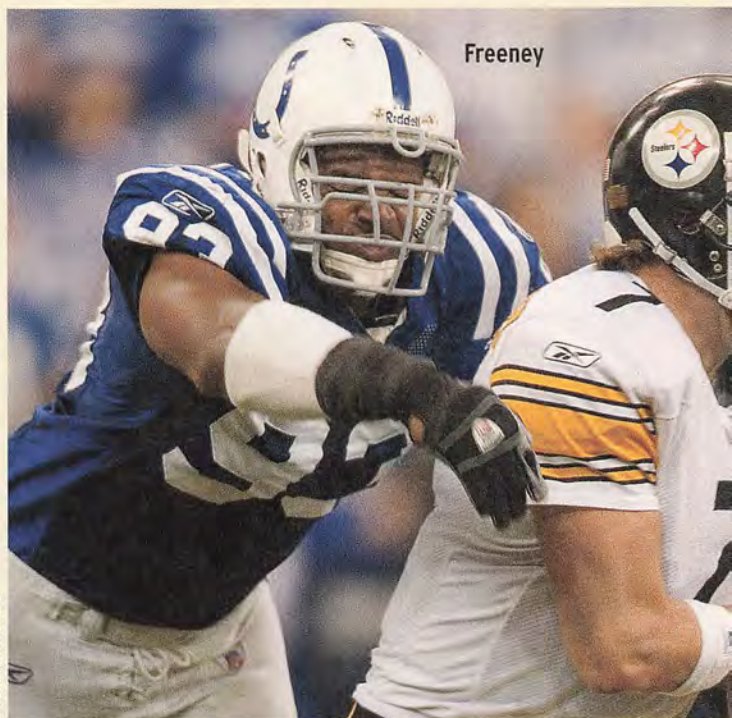
## SECRET WEAPON

### BEN UTECHT, TE

He's the ideal fit in the Colts' two-tight end formation—a competent blocker and reliable midrange receiver who consistently makes catches that move the chains. Utecht's ability to work from the end of the line allows the team to move starting TE Dallas Clark into the slot and basically work as a third wide receiver.



## SCOUTING REPORTS: DEFENSE



Freeney

### Dwight Freeney, E

**Strengths:** Has an excellent motor and the best first step in the league. A relentless pass rusher who gets around the edge quickly and puts pressure on the entire left side of the opponent's line. Shows good lean to turn the corner and rare closing burst from the backside. Can generate a bull rush because he plays with such excellent leverage. Has improved against the run.

**Weaknesses:** Tries the same moves all the time. Must win with quickness when teams run at him. Can be moved off the line by double-team blocks.

**Bottom line:** Freeney's speed and explosiveness make him one of the best ends in the NFL, but he must find new ways to deal with the constant double-teams. **Grade: 9.4**

### Robert Mathis, E

**Strengths:** A pass-rush specialist who shows excellent burst off the line. Has solid lean and body control to turn the corner. Consistently wins with his spin move. Has good closing speed and is relentless in pursuit of quarterbacks from the backside.

**Weaknesses:** Not great against the run. Not naturally instinctive and can

struggle to find the ball. Consistently gets sucked upfield and is out of position against the draw. Durability is an issue.

**Bottom line:** Not only is Mathis a threat as a pass rusher, but he is an outstanding special teams player.

**Grade: 7.6**

### Anthony McFarland, T

**Strengths:** Explosive and quick, with a great first step. Makes plays along the line and is effective in pursuit. Uses his hands well and gets good separation. Has strong shed ability and plays with good recognition.

**Weaknesses:** Not a two-gap player and struggles to take on double-teams. Takes a lot of punishment, and his durability is an increasing concern.

**Bottom line:** McFarland is effective as a one-gap interior lineman and can create havoc in the backfield off the snap. **Grade: 7.7**

### Raheem Brock, T

**Strengths:** Strong at the point of attack. Hard to run at him, especially when he is single-blocked. Has strong shed ability. A good inside pass rusher with a nice bull rush.

**Weaknesses:** Not quick or fast. Lacks ideal bulk. Does not display many

## SCOUT TAKES

## A scout from another team sizes up the Colts

Winning a Super Bowl was the thing that drove **Peyton**

**Manning** and the rest of the team. Now that they have it, the big question is: Will the hunger and fight still be there for 16 weeks? ... They're a much different team when **Bob Sanders** is healthy. He's the heart and soul of that defense. He brings that physical style of play and raises the level of the players around him. ... Do I think **Joseph Addai** can be the man at

**Sanders** running back? Absolutely. He's got vision, quick feet, gets to the hole fast, has a nose for the end zone and isn't a bad receiver. ... **Jeff Saturday** isn't the biggest or most athletic offensive lineman, but he's the anchor of their line. He battles, he competes. ... Watching their defense on film, it's kind of funny. All of their starters and backups are almost interchangeable. They know the players they need to have, and they draft well.



BOB LEVERONE / SI

The inability to deal with the run—the defense allowed league-worst averages of 173 yards per game and 5.3 yards per attempt—limited pass-rushing opportunities. Robert Mathis and Dwight Freeney combined for only 15 sacks last year, but remain relentless difference-makers and perfect components for the scheme. Josh Thomas is the top backup at end. He's effective against the run and a solid pass-rush option in the nickel.

Starting tackles Anthony McFarland and Raheem Brock played better as a duo as last season wound down. At 300 pounds, McFarland provides some bulk while Brock compensates for a lack of weight (274 pounds) with quickness off the ball. Depth is shaky. Klecko and Reid are decent up-the-field guys; third-round pick Quinn Pitcock is considered a better run stopper than a pass rusher. The status of Corey Simon remains a mystery, but it seems likely he will be released before training camp. **GRADE: B**

**Linebackers**—The Colts' scheme calls for linebackers to have lots of speed and the ability to cover. Continuity, apparently, is not a requirement. For the fourth time in five seasons, the team allowed a starting linebacker to leave as an unrestricted free agent. The latest to depart is June—the weakside starter—and his loss leaves the unit at risk.

Gary Brackett, who returns for a third season in the middle, is quick to the ball and solid in coverage but can be overpowered in run support. Rob Morris was re-signed after playing well as the late-season replacement on the strong side, but Morris is a natural middle backer who might be best suited as a backup at this point in his career.

The rest of the group is largely unproven. Freddy Keiaho, a third-round pick in '06, flies to the ball and will get the first crack at replacing June. Rookie fourth-rounder Clint Session fits the team's system. Veteran Rocky Boiman does well against the run.

The team's focus on speed over size proved to be a liability

pass-rush moves.

**Bottom line:** Brock is a high-effort player who uses his strength and leverage to make plays. **Grade: 7.5**

### Gary Brackett, LB

**Strengths:** Has great speed and quickness. Plays well laterally. Has very good short-area burst. A good tackler; can break down in the open field and wrap up ballcarriers.

**Weaknesses:** Not strong and can be engulfed and driven all over the field. Struggles to shed.

**Bottom line:** Brackett only fits as a starter in a Tony Dungy-type defense, where speed and quickness are the most important qualities. **Grade: 6.4**

### Rob Morris, LB

**Strengths:** Diagnoses plays quickly and attacks the line when he reads the run. Plays with a mean streak and is physical at the point of attack. Has a nonstop motor. A sure tackler.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal change-of-direction skills. Doesn't show great burst and lacks the man-to-man cover skills to stay with most backs. Lacks top speed and doesn't show great range in zone coverage.

**Bottom line:** Morris is best suited to play special teams, but it's hard to discount his impact on the Colts' run defense down the stretch last season. **Grade: 6.0**

### Freddy Keiaho, LB

**Strengths:** Athletic and aggressive. Shows nice initial burst and quickness. Has great instincts; takes good angles. Chases down plays from sideline to sideline and has the speed to make plays from behind. Explodes into tackles. Shows good ball skills.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks NFL height and bulk. Consistently is overmatched by bigger blockers. Technique is raw. Sometimes is overaggressive.

**Bottom line:** Because of his lack of ideal size, he faces an uphill battle as a starter, even in the Colts' cover 2 defense. **Grade: 5.9**

### Marlin Jackson, CB

**Strengths:** Has very good size and range. Uses his hands well at the line to ride receivers out of routes. Has good techniques and is a smart player. Has good speed and ball skills and very soft hands.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks short-area explo-

sion and quickness. Must do a better job of recognizing and reacting to plays, and make better breaks on the ball.

**Bottom line:** Jackson has talent; he just needs more confidence and experience. **Grade: 7.2**

### Kelvin Hayden, CB

**Strengths:** Looks the part. Has good length, size and toughness. Strong in press coverage and will challenge the receiver off the line. Good in jump-ball situations.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal short-area quickness and rounds off his breaks out of his backpedal.

**Bottom line:** Hayden is a big corner in Dungy's Tampa 2 defense. He gained some valuable experience in 2006 and, with the departures of Nick Harper and Jason David, likely will be the starter on opening day. **Grade: 6.8**

### Bob Sanders, S

**Strengths:** Has excellent speed and quickness. Plays bigger than his size. Extremely aggressive and physical and will intimidate receivers coming across the field. Plays with great energy and intensity. A big hitter and a solid tackler.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal height, which hinders his playmaking ability downfield. At his best in zone coverage. Gets out of position at times trying to make plays on the ball.

**Bottom line:** Sanders is the best player in the Colts' back seven. He's fast and aggressive, and that combination allows him to fill a lot of holes on the field. **Grade: 9.3**

### Antoine Bethea, S

**Strengths:** A tough, gritty safety who plays the run hard. Shows good technique and footwork and is a fine open-field tackler. Has good initial quickness off the snap. Has good hands and makes big plays.

**Weaknesses:** Can be overly aggressive and is vulnerable to play fakes and double moves. Doesn't have elite size. Must improve his lower-body strength.

**Bottom line:** Bethea's speed, range and open-field tackling ability allow him to cover the deep middle and give Sanders the freedom to play closer to the line, where he is at his best. **Grade: 6.5**

on occasion last season. Too often, the undersized linebackers were unable to get off blocks and make tackles or failed to wrap up ballcarriers. **GRADE: C-**

**Secondary**—This unit also has question marks—especially at cornerback, where Marlin Jackson and Kelvin Hayden will have to replace David and Harper. Jackson (6-0, 196) and Hayden (6-0, 195) have good size, but they have started a combined two games at corner the past two seasons. The top backups—'06 second-round pick Tim Jennings and '07 third-rounder Daymeion Hughes—also are unproven. Jennings' might have the edge on the nickel job because he's more familiar with the system, but the team likes Hughes' hitting ability.

The key at safety—and perhaps for the entire unit—is Sanders' health. A big hitter who provides an emotional presence, Sanders was a catalyst to the Super Bowl victory, but he has missed half of the team's 48 regular-season games the past three seasons. If Sanders can stay on field, he and Antoine Bethea, a sixth-round pick in '06 who started 14 games, will form a solid safety duo. Depth at the position is a concern—especially because of Sanders' injury history. The only reserve with NFL experience is Matt Giordano, a competent stopgap option and solid special teams contributor.

This unit's prime objective is limiting over-the-top plays—and it has excelled in that area. After yielding 50 receptions and 13 touchdowns of at least 20 yards in 2004, it has allowed 55 and nine in those categories the past two seasons. Will the new corners be able to keep the big plays under control? The answer will be a big factor in shaping the Colts' season. **GRADE: C-**

## SPECIAL TEAMS

Dungy doesn't just give lip service to this area. He gives position coach Russ Purnell adequate time to develop the coverage and return units. That said, the coverage must be upgraded. Injuries and personnel decisions resulted in frequent lineup changes, which led to too many big returns.

Adam Vinatieri remains the best clutch kicker in league history. He converted 39-of-43 field-goal attempts in the regular season and postseason in his first year with the team. And forget about Vinatieri's losing leg strength. In the playoffs, he drilled a 50-yarder against the Chiefs and a 51-yarder against the Ravens.

Hunter Smith remains one of the NFL's most reliable punters. His forte is pinning opponents deep, and he has mastered a rugby-style punt that routinely dies inside the 20.

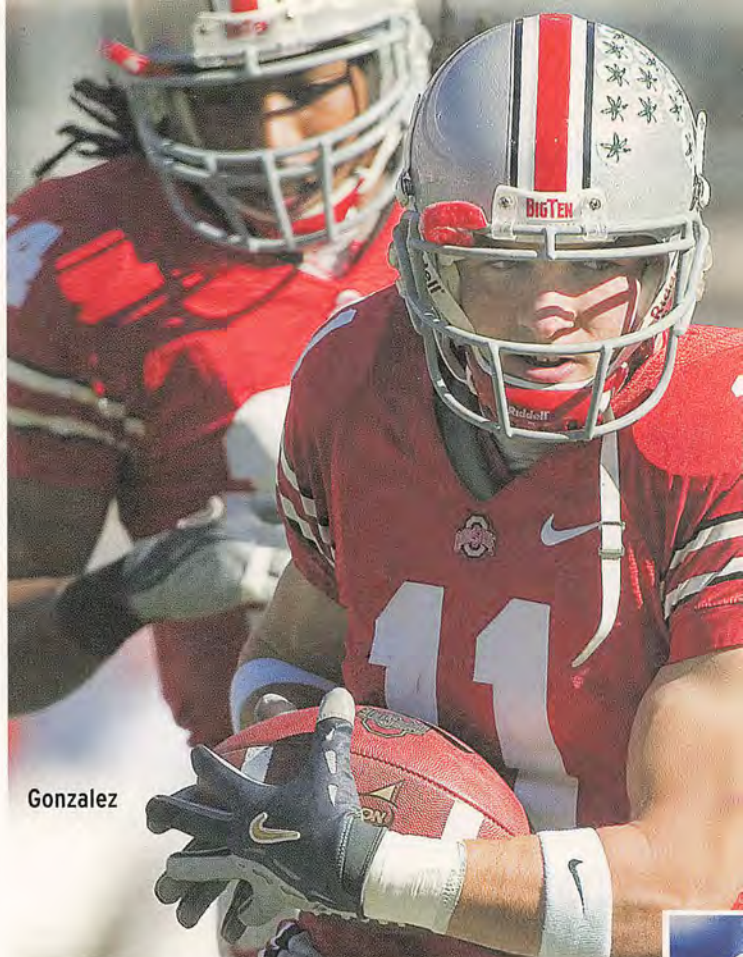
The return duties likely will fall to second-year pro T.J. Rushing, who showed flashes in limited opportunities as a rookie.

**GRADE: B-**

## BOTTOM LINE

Seven players who started a combined 273 games for Indy no longer are on the roster—a significant hit, for sure. But if the Colts keep their difference-making core players on the field, they will be challengers not only for a fifth straight AFC South title, but also for a second straight Super Bowl championship. Expectations are high—and they should be. But to realize those expectations, the Colts have to fix their problems on defense, particularly because they face stiff competition in the AFC. SN

*Mike Chappell covers the Colts for the Indianapolis Star.*



Gonzalez

## KEY MOVES

### 2007 DRAFT PICKS

Rd.-Pick

**GRADE B**

**1-32 Anthony Gonzalez, WR, Ohio State**

Will make an impact with his quickness and ability to run after the catch.

**2-42 Tony Ugoh, G/T, Arkansas**

Brings quality depth and needed youth to the line.

**3-95 Daymeion Hughes, CB, California**

A big hitter who is comfortable in zones. Will vie for the nickel job.

**3-98 Quinn Pitcock, DT, Ohio State**

A solid run stuffer who will be in the tackle rotation.

**4-131 Brannon Condren, S, Troy**

Has savvy and size (6-1, 208). Will compete to be a top backup.

**4-136 Clint Session, OLB, Pitt**

Undersized but excels in coverage. Will help on the weak side.

**5-169 Roy Hall, WR, Ohio State**

Fast, physical and big, but still in the developmental stage.

**5-173 Michael Coe, CB, Alabama State**

A converted receiver who could grow into the position.

**7-242 Keyunta Dawson, DE, Texas Tech**

Like other Colts pass rushers, he lacks ideal size (6-3, 254).

### VETERAN PLAYERS

**Additions:** G Rick DeMulling (FA/Lions), QB John Navarre (FA/Cardinals), TE Mike Seidman (FA/Panthers).

**Losses:** CB Jason David (FA/Saints), S Mike Doss (FA/Vikings), LB Gilbert Gardner (FA), CB Nick Harper (FA/Titans), LB Cato June (FA/Bucs), LB Mike Labino (FA), DT Montae Reagor (FA/Eagles), RB Dominic Rhodes (FA/Raiders), WR Brandon Stokley (FA/Broncos), KR Terrence Wilkins (FA).

### STADIUM/MEDIA

RCA Dome (55,506, artificial)

Tickets: 317-297-7000

Training camp: Rose-Hulman

Technical Institute, Terre

Haute, Ind.; 812-872-6884

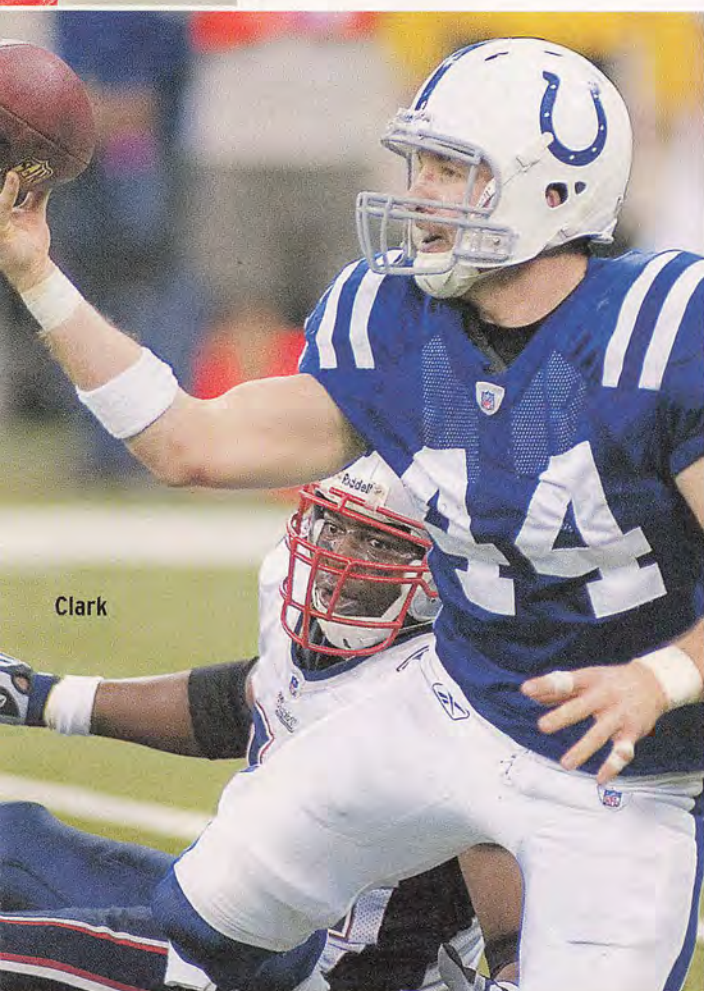
Radio: WNDE-AM (1260);

WFBQ-FM (94.7)

Website: colts.com

## PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
QB	▲ Peyton Manning □ Jim Sorgi	LE	■ Robert Mathis ● Josh Thomas
TE	● Ben Utecht ● Bryan Fletcher	LT	● Raheem Brock □ Darrell Reid
RB	■ Joseph Addai □ DeDe Dorsey	RT	● Anthony McFarland □ Dan Klecko
WR	▲ Reggie Wayne ● Aaron Moorehead	RE	▲ Dwight Freeney □ Bo Schobel
WR	▲ Marvin Harrison ● Anthony Gonzalez	SLB	● Rob Morris □ Rocky Boiman
TE	■ Dallas Clark ● Bryan Fletcher	MLB	● Gary Brackett □ Keith O'Neil
LT	▲ Tarik Glenn ● Charlie Johnson	WLB	● Freddy Keiaho □ Clint Session
LG	■ Ryan Lilja ● Tony Ugoh	LCB	■ Marlin Jackson □ Daymeion Hughes
C	▲ Jeff Saturday ● Dylan Gandy	SS	▲ Bob Sanders □ Brannon Condren
RG	■ Jake Scott ● Rick DeMulling	FS	■ Antoine Bethea ● Matt Giordano
RT	■ Ryan Diem □ Dan Federkell	RCB	● Kelvin Hayden ● Tim Jennings
SPECIALISTS			
K	▲ Adam Vinatieri	KR	□ T.J. Rushing
P	■ Hunter Smith	PR	□ T.J. Rushing
		LS	■ Justin Snow
	▲ Elite ■ Solid ● Adequate □ Fringe		

Depth charts updated weekly at [sportingnews.com](http://sportingnews.com)

Clark

MATTHEW KUTZ / SN ARCHIVES

## COLTS ROSTER

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL exp.	College	How acq.	2006 GP/GS
QUARTERBACKS							
18	Peyton Manning	6-5/230	3/24/76	10	Tennessee	D1/98	16/16
16	John Navarre	6-6/250	9/9/80	4	Michigan	FA/07	0/0
12	Jim Sorgi	6-5/196	12/3/80	4	Wisconsin	D6b/04	1/0
RUNNING BACKS							
29	Joseph Addai	5-11/214	5/3/83	2	LSU	D1/06	16/0
30	DeDe Dorsey	5-11/196	8/1/84	2	Lindenwood	W-Cin/06	13/0
36	Kenton Keith	5-11/210	7/14/80	1	New Mexico State	FA/07	0/0
RECEIVERS							
44	Dallas Clark (TE)	6-3/252	6/12/79	5	Iowa	D1/03	12/12
81	Bryan Fletcher (TE)	6-5/230	3/23/79	3	UCLA	FA/05	15/3
11	Anthony Gonzalez	6-0/195	9/18/84	R	Ohio State	D1/07	—
83	Roy Hall	6-3/240	12/8/83	R	Ohio State	D5a/07	—
88	Marvin Harrison	6-0/185	8/25/72	12	Syracuse	D1/96	16/16
85	Aaron Moorehead	6-3/200	11/5/80	5	Illinois	FA/03	12/0
82	Mike Seidman (TE)	6-4/261	2/11/81	5	UCLA	FA/07	3/3
48	Justin Snow (TE)	6-3/240	12/21/76	8	Baylor	FA/00	16/0
84	John Standford	6-4/206	4/15/82	2	Purdue	FA/05	0/0
86	Ben Utecht (TE)	6-6/249	6/30/81	4	Minnesota	FA/04	15/15
87	Reggie Wayne	6-0/198	11/17/78	7	Miami	D1/01	16/16
OFFENSIVE LINEMEN							
64	Rick DeMulling (G)	6-4/304	7/21/77	7	Idaho	FA/07	14/7
71	Ryan Diem (T)	6-6/320	7/1/79	7	Northern Illinois	D4/01	15/15
76	Daniel Federkell (T)	6-6/290	11/9/83	2	Calgary	FA/06	2/0
57	Dylan Gandy (G)	6-3/300	3/8/82	3	Texas Tech	D4a/05	16/11
78	Tarik Glenn (T)	6-5/332	5/25/76	11	California	D1/97	16/16
74	Charlie Johnson (T)	6-4/305	5/2/84	2	Oklahoma State	D6a/06	16/1
65	Ryan Lilja (G)	6-2/285	10/15/81	4	Kansas State	W-KC/04	11/5
63	Jeff Saturday (C)	6-2/295	6/8/75	9	North Carolina	FA/99	16/16
73	Jake Scott (G)	6-5/295	4/16/81	4	Idaho	D5/04	16/16
67	Tony Ugoh (G/T)	6-5/305	11/17/83	R	Arkansas	D2/07	—
69	Matt Ulrich (G)	6-2/309	12/30/81	3	Northwestern	FA/05	5/0
DEFENSIVE LINEMEN							
79	Raheem Brock (E)	6-4/274	6/10/78	6	Temple	FA/02	16/16
61	Keyunta Dawson (E)	6-3/254	9/13/85	R	Texas Tech	D7/07	—
93	Dwight Freeney (E)	6-1/268	2/19/80	6	Syracuse	D1/02	16/16
61	Dan Klecko (T)	5-11/275	1/12/81	5	Temple	W-NE/06	10/0
99	Ryan LaCasse (E)	6-2/257	2/6/83	2	Syracuse	T-Bal/06	12/0
98	Robert Mathis (E)	6-2/245	2/26/81	5	Alabama A&M	D5a/03	16/16
92	Anthony McFarland (T)	6-0/300	12/18/77	9	LSU	T-TB/06	16/16
72	Quinn Pitcock (T)	6-3/295	9/14/83	R	Ohio State	D3b/07	—
95	Darrell Reid (T)	6-2/288	6/20/82	3	Minnesota	FA/05	15/0
64	Bo Schobel (E)	6-5/264	3/24/81	4	TCU	FA/06	14/0
97	Corey Simon (T)	6-2/300	3/2/77	8	Florida State	FA/05	0/0
91	Josh Thomas (E)	6-5/271	6/26/81	4	Syracuse	FA/04	14/0
LINEBACKERS							
50	Rocky Boiman	6-4/236	1/24/80	6	Notre Dame	FA/06	16/1
58	Gary Brackett	5-11/235	5/23/80	5	Rutgers	FA/03	14/14
56	Tyjuan Hagler	6-0/236	12/3/81	3	Cincinnati	D5c/05	9/0
54	Freddy Keiaho	5-11/226	12/18/82	2	San Diego State	D3/06	14/0
94	Rob Morris	6-2/243	1/18/75	8	Brigham Young	D1/00	15/5
53	Keith O'Neil	6-0/235	8/26/80	5	Northern Arizona	W-Dal/05	10/0
55	Clint Session	6-0/235	8/22/84	R	Pitt	D4b/07	—
DEFENSIVE BACKS							
41	Antoine Bethea (S)	5-11/203	7/27/84	2	Howard	D6b/06	14/14
32	Michael Coe (CB)	6-1/188	12/17/83	R	Alabama State	D5b/07	—
42	Brannon Condren (S)	6-1/205	8/19/83	R	Troy	D4a/07	—
43	Matt Giordano (S)	5-11/196	10/16/82	3	California	D4b/05	12/1
26	Kelvin Hayden (CB)	6-0/195	7/23/83	3	Illinois	D2/05	15/1
20	Daymeion Hughes (CB)	5-10/190	8/21/85	R	California	D3a/07	—
28	Marlin Jackson (CB)	6-0/196	6/30/83	3	Michigan	D1/05	14/8
27	Tim Jennings (CB)	5-8/185	12/24/83	2	Georgia	D2/06	11/0
34	T.J. Rushing (CB)	5-9/186	6/8/83	2	Stanford	D7/06	6/0
21	Bob Sanders (S)	5-8/206	2/24/81	4	Iowa	D2/04	4/4
SPECIALISTS							
17	Hunter Smith (P)	6-2/209	8/9/77	9	Notre Dame	D7a/99	16/0
4	Adam Vinatieri (K)	6-0/202	12/28/72	12	South Dakota St.	FA/06	13/0

Abbreviations: D1-draft pick, first round; W-claimed on waivers; T-obtained in trade; FA-free-agent acquisition.



# JAGUARS

**How good are the Jaguars? After a wildly inconsistent 2006 season, we're about to find out.**

**SN PICK** 2nd, AFC South (8-8)

By MICHAEL C. WRIGHT

Turnover has become commonplace on Jack Del Rio's staff during his four years as Jaguars head coach. If the team fails to meet expectations like last season, it's likely Del Rio will be the one looking for a new job.

The Jags have lots of talent, but they are wildly unpredictable. Last season, they blasted the Colts but lost twice to the Texans. They downed five playoff teams but lost games to Buffalo and Washington. Such inconsistency no longer is acceptable for a team that went 12-4 in 2005.

The hope now is the team will deal with fewer major injuries than it did last season and have more stability at quarterback. Coordinator Dirk Koetter was hired to install an uptempo offense, and that will be a key story line to follow early in the season.

## OFFENSE

A punishing rushing attack spearheaded by Fred Taylor and Maurice Jones-Drew was offset last season by instability in the passing game. Koetter, who has no NFL experience, likes to throw the deep ball off play-action and get his tight ends involved. The passing game will progress if wide receivers Reggie Williams and Matt Jones realize their potential.

**Quarterbacks**—The club plays its best with Leftwich in the lineup, but Leftwich reportedly has been feuding with Del Rio dating back to the playoff loss to New England two years ago. Del Rio has communicated his desire to mend the relationship through his actions—he named Leftwich the starter heading into the offseason. Leftwich has a strong, accurate arm and has worked at improving his footwork. There's no questioning his toughness, but injuries continue to bother him.

Backup David Garrard, who started 10 games in 2006, also has a strong arm but doesn't see the field as well as Leftwich. Too many times last season, Garrard tried to make plays when the situation called for him to throw the ball away, and that led to turnovers. Garrard did little last season to prove he's a worthy NFL starter.

## SCHEDULE

All times Eastern

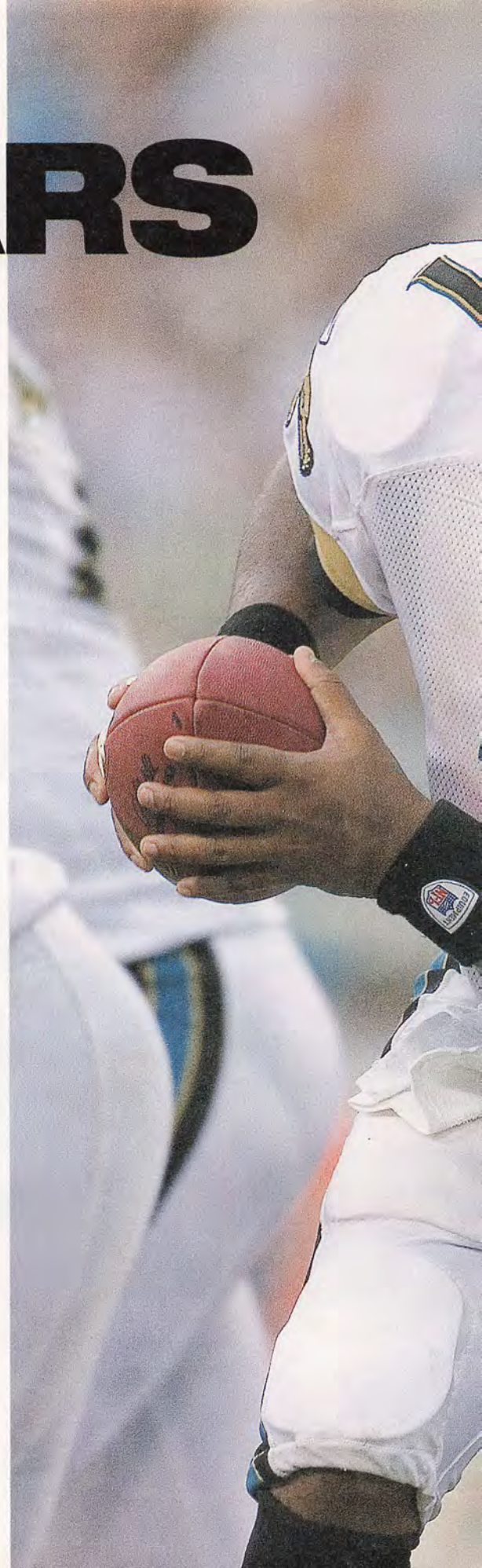
Sept. 9	TENNESSEE	1:00
Sept. 16	ATLANTA	1:00
Sept. 23	at Denver	4:05
Sept. 30	Open date	
Oct. 7	at Kansas City	1:00
Oct. 14	HOUSTON	1:00
Oct. 22	INDIANAPOLIS*	8:30
Oct. 28	at Tampa Bay	4:05
Nov. 4	at New Orleans	1:00
Nov. 11	at Tennessee	1:00
Nov. 18	SAN DIEGO	1:00
Nov. 25	BUFFALO	1:00
Dec. 2	at Indianapolis	1:00
Dec. 9	CAROLINA	1:00
Dec. 16	at Pittsburgh	1:00
Dec. 23	OAKLAND	1:00
Dec. 29	at Houston	1:00

Strength of schedule: T-11th

\*Monday

Analysis of every Jaguars game:  
sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom

## REGULAR-SEASON WINS





Leftwich

Quinn Gray possesses a nice combination of arm strength and running ability. It's hard to evaluate his prospects because he hasn't played enough. **GRADE: C+**

**Running backs**—After nine seasons, Taylor still has home run speed and an array of nifty moves. He is most dangerous on power runs and cutback plays.

Jones-Drew established himself as a star on the rise during his electric rookie season, when he rushed for 13 touchdowns and ranked second on the team with 46 catches. Defenders have a hard time spotting the 5-7 Jones-Drew, who uses his low center of gravity and leg strength to run through arm tackles. Once in the open field, he can go the distance.

LaBrandon Toefield is effective on inside runs, but there were only 22 carries left over for him in 2006. Greg Jones can be used in the fullback role when needed. He missed last season because of a knee injury but was well ahead of schedule in the spring. Jones has a punishing style, and his biggest role might be as a short-yardage runner. He also has good hands.

#### **GRADE: A**

**Receivers**—Williams led the team in receptions and touchdowns, but those numbers (52 and four) reflected progress, not star status. He is a big target, one of the NFL's most physical receivers and tough to bring down. He excels on short inside routes but disappeared in too many games in '06. He spent part of the offseason trying to improve his speed and has shed a few pounds.

Jones and Ernest Wilford likely will alternate again at No. 2 receiver. At 6-6, 242, Jones has deceptive speed and soft hands but doesn't always play aggressively. Wilford (6-4, 223) is another big target. He is a possession receiver who excels at out-jumping defenders. Free-agent pickup Dennis Northcutt could be a difference-maker working out of the slot. He can find

## SCOUT TAKES

### **A scout from another team sizes up the Jaguars**

**Fred Taylor** and **Maurice Jones-Drew** are one of the better running back tandems in the league. They both can run inside with strength, although Taylor would rather bounce it outside and be more of a finesse guy. ... **Marcus Stroud** and **John Henderson** are great point of attack guys. As rush guys, they're not real good. But they're able to get pressure because they're so strong, can get linemen's hands off them and walk guys back into the quarterback. ... I would probably go with **David Garrard** at quarterback instead of **Byron Leftwich** because of the mobility. Garrard gives them a chance to make a play. Leftwich is just so deliberate. ... **Rashean Mathis** is very instinctive, good around the ball and a good tackler. But they protect him with help over the top a lot of time. If he had to play more an-to-man, he wouldn't be as good of a corner.



Taylor

ALBERT DICKSON / SN

ROBERT SEALE / SN ARCHIVES



openings and create mismatches with his speed—and Koetter could call his number on deep balls.

The club upgraded the unit's speed by drafting Mike Walker in the third round and John Broussard in the seventh. Walker, coming off a torn ACL, surprised scouts by running a 4.35 40 at the Scouting Combine. He could push for playing time this season.

Marcedes Lewis and free-agent addition Jermaine Wiggins could thrive because Koetter plans to involve the tight ends more. Lewis didn't have many passes go his way as a rookie, but he held up surprisingly well as a blocker. The team made him a first-round pick in 2006 for what he could contribute as a receiver, so look for his size (6-6, 265) and skill to be used more in the passing game.

Wiggins isn't the devastating blocker Kyle Brady was, but Wiggins is a better receiver. He isn't a big-play guy but has soft hands and piles up catches as a nice checkdown option. George Wrihster can play tight end or H-back. He, too, has some play-making ability. **GRADE: C-**

**Line**—There was plenty to like about this unit last season. The Jags regularly won the time-of-possession battle, they set a franchise mark by rushing for 2,541 yards and their quarterbacks were sacked a manageable 30 times. The line returns every starter and added former Raven Tony Pashos to play right tackle. Pashos is a big, physical blocker who plays aggressively and with good leverage. Though he's not considered a technician, he takes precise angles when run blocking.

Center Brad Meester plays with good technique, and his ability to slide efficiently makes up for a lack of quickness. He possesses adequate strength but needs help in pass protection. Right guard Chris Naeole plays with a mean streak and finishes blocks but lacks ideal quickness.

At left tackle, Khalif Barnes likely will beat out Maurice Williams. Barnes is quick and athletic and three years younger than Williams, who started at right tackle last season. Williams has a good feel for the game but tends to get pushed around. Left guard Vince Manuwai has excellent strength and explosion, but his short arms can be a liability against taller defenders.

## FANTASY SOURCE PICKS

**STUD**  
RB Maurice Jones-Drew ▶

**SLEEPER**  
Defense/special teams

**STUMBLER**  
WR Matt Jones

**RISK/REWARD**  
RB Fred Taylor



BOB LEVERONE / SN

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## SCOUTING REPORTS: OFFENSE

### Byron Leftwich, QB

**Strengths:** A strapping player with a strong arm. Throws a good deep ball and deep-out route. Quick release compensates for long windup. Pure pocket passer. Accurate when feet are set. Avoids sacks.

**Weaknesses:** Not fast or a running threat. Lacks touch; every throw comes out hot. Slow coming out from under center and is better in shotgun.

**Bottom line:** Leftwich has enough talent to be a Pro Bowl player, but he needs to stay healthy and improve his consistency and touch to get to that level. **Grade: 7.2**

### ↑ Maurice Jones-Drew, RB

**Strengths:** A threat as a runner, receiver and returner. Shows lower-body strength and leg drive. Quick to the second level and will bounce runs outside. Shows body control and change-of-direction skills. Catches passes at full speed. Recognizes coverages, gets open and can catch passes over his head.

**Weaknesses:** Not big enough to be an every-down back. Dances too much in the hole and is too quick to run laterally. Not a physical blocker and must improve blitz awareness. Can't move the pile or drag tacklers.

**Bottom line:** Jones-Drew shocked the NFL with his performance as a rookie. He excels as a receiver and is a tougher interior runner than you would expect. **Grade: 8.5**

### Fred Taylor, RB

**Strengths:** Has quick feet, which allows him to stop and start suddenly. Has good balance, agility and speed. Has great acceleration through the hole and cutback ability. Uses a great stutter-step to freeze defenders and still has the speed to turn the corner. A threat in the passing game.

**Weaknesses:** Durability always is a concern. Not much of a pass blocker.

**Bottom line:** Last season, Taylor rushed for more than 1,100 yards for the sixth time in nine seasons and averaged a career-best 5.0 yards a carry. He has devoted himself to an offseason training regimen and shows no signs of slowing. **Grade: 8.3**

### Matt Jones, WR

**Strengths:** Has deep speed and is very athletic. Uses his jumping ability to go up and get the ball. Can make highlight-

reel catches. Good body control.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to run better routes and better understand coverages. Doesn't always play as fast as his 40 time. Doesn't sustain his blocks downfield.

**Bottom line:** Jones has the tools to be a productive starter, but he needs to smooth out the rough edges and become more consistent before he realizes a breakout season. **Grade: 7.0**

### Reggie Williams, WR

**Strengths:** Provides a big target over the middle and in the red zone. Knows how to use his body to shield defenders and go inside to make catches in traffic. A solid route runner.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to improve his hands and concentration; has been plagued by drops. Often seems unsure of where to be.

**Bottom line:** Williams has the tools to be a good player but needs to be more consistent in a lot of phases. **Grade: 7.0**

### Ernest Wilford, WR

**Strengths:** Outstanding size makes him a solid red zone target and possession receiver. Good in traffic and over the middle. Simply overpowering on jump balls. Breaks tackles.

**Weaknesses:** Not a quick-twitch player. Lacks deep speed. Has below-average flexibility and rounds off his routes.

**Bottom line:** Wilford plays with power, toughness and effort. He gets open by using his strength. Though he isn't a game-changing receiver, Wilford is a solid contributor. **Grade: 6.9**

### Khalif Barnes, T

**Strengths:** Shows athleticism and sets up quickly in pass protection. Mirrors quick edge rushers. Works well going forward and can block moving targets. Can overpower linebackers at the second level.

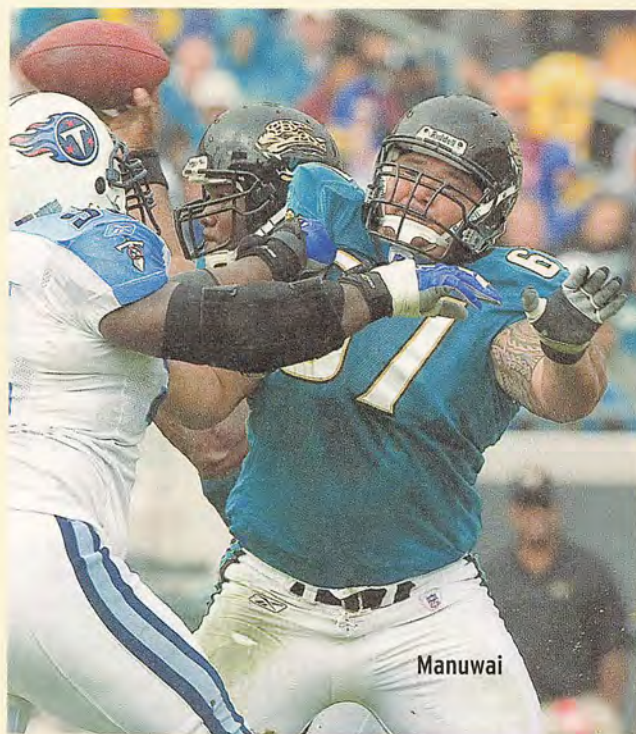
**Weaknesses:** Lacks technique and is not a hard worker. Needs to finish blocks better; gets lazy and doesn't always move his feet.

**Bottom line:** Barnes is a terrific athlete and has the tools to be a very good offensive tackle. His work ethic could be better, but he likely will win the left tackle job. **Grade: 7.5**

### Tony Pashos, T

**Strengths:** Very strong and can engulf

Players are graded by War Room scouts on a 1-10 scale.  
 \*Rookies (not graded)



BOB LEVERONE / SN

defenders. Has strong hands and can steer opponents with good leg drive and hip roll. Has a nasty streak and finishes his blocks.

**Weaknesses:** Doesn't bend his knees enough and gets top-heavy in pass protection. Lunges to make blocks and can be beaten by good speed rushers who alter their moves. Has below-average quickness.

**Bottom line:** Pashos, who was a two-year starter for the Ravens, will provide a nice upgrade on the Jags' line because of his strength as a run blocker. **Grade: 6.9**

### Chris Naeole, G

**Strengths:** Plays hard every down. Thick; has excellent size and strength. Effective in pass protection and uses his strong hands to control opponents. Recovers quickly. Has great strength to anchor; can absorb and hold his ground. Pulls and traps effectively.

**Weaknesses:** Not great in space and struggles against quick, one-gap defensive tackles. Sometimes has trouble with double moves in pass protection.

**Bottom line:** Naeole is not an elite guard, but his opponents have an all-out battle when they go against him. **Grade: 7.0**

### Vince Manuwai, G

**Strengths:** Tough, physical and plays with an edge. Has an excellent motor and a strong initial punch. Plays with excellent leverage in the running game and is solid when pulling on counters. Has a great anchor in pass protection.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to improve his balance and body control. Can be late off the ball. Needs to improve his awareness and consistency in pass protection.

**Bottom line:** A blue-collar mauler, Manuwai must overcome his lack of athleticism and instincts to become a top lineman. **Grade: 6.4**

### Brad Meester, C

**Strengths:** Athletic and has quick feet. Plays with balance and body control. Comes off the ball hard and can get to the second level quickly. A smart player and a great technician. Gets his linemen in the proper positions.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks great bulk and lower-body strength. Struggles against big, strong nose tackles. Does not consistently move the pile in the running game.

**Bottom line:** Meester is a decent player who seldom is out of position and compensates for a lack of strength by using good technique. **Grade: 6.9**

**KEY:** ↑ Ascending ↓ Descending

## INSIDERS POLL



Based on a poll of SN's 32 team correspondents

## BOLD PREDICTIONS

- 1 Despite playing for yet another coordinator, QB Byron Leftwich will have a career year. This is a make-or-break season for Leftwich, and he has the ability to rise to the occasion.
- 2 WR Matt Jones won't develop much more in his third season, making him a candidate to be traded or released. Jones is a big-play threat but loses concentration in traffic.
- 3 WR Reggie Williams will significantly improve his production. He has slowly improved his numbers each season and appears primed for his first 1,000-yard season.

The loser in the battle between Barnes and Williams becomes the top backup at tackle. Also in the tackle mix is Richard Collier, a former undrafted free agent who is massive (6-7, 358) and has quick hands but struggles in space.

The team has confidence in backup center Dennis Norman, who has filled in capably for Meester in the past. Norman isn't overly polished or physical for his size (6-5, 323), but he can get out and block in space. He also can play guard. The top backup at guard is Stockar McDougale, a former first-round pick whose career has been marked by weight issues and struggles against quicker defenders. **GRADE: B**

### DEFENSE

This unit, which is filled with high-quality players, was hit hard by injuries last season. All of the players are on pace to return this season, and coordinator Mike Smith would love to have more stability on the depth chart.

Led by mammoth tackles Marcus Stroud and John Henderson, the Jaguars don't try to confuse opponents with complicated schemes. They simply take advantage of their size up front and ample speed in the back seven.

**Line**—This unit is the strength of the defense. It excels at stuffing the run and generates the bulk of the pressure the team puts on quarterbacks. Stroud is big and powerful and plays with good technique. Henderson has the same skill set but is even bigger. He isn't as quick off the ball as Stroud, but both are rangy. When Stroud and Henderson go all out, they are virtually impossible to block, though both tend to wear down late in games. There also is concern over Stroud's lingering ankle injury.

Left end Reggie Hayward, who suffered a season-ending torn



## SCOUTING REPORTS: DEFENSE

Achilles' tendon in Week 1, is the team's best speed rusher. Right end Paul Spicer doesn't blow you away with ability, but he is relentless as a pass rusher. Bobby McCray registered a career-high 10 sacks after his role increased following the injury to Hayward. McCray, whose game also is built on speed, returns to a backup role but will see the field plenty.

Rob Meier is the top backup at tackle and also can play end. He has the size to occupy blockers and the speed to be a factor as a rusher. Second-year players Tony McDaniel and Brent Hawkins figure in the mix, too. The 6-7 McDaniel is a finesse interior pass rusher. Hawkins is an edge pass rusher who also can play outside linebacker.

The team took a risk by using a fourth-round pick on end Brian Smith, who is coming off a broken right hip. If he recovers sufficiently, Smith could become a significant contributor as a pass-rush specialist. **GRADE: A**

**Linebackers**—The linebackers often are free to make plays because the line does such a good job occupying blockers. Middle linebacker Mike Peterson, who is returning from a season-ending pectoral injury, is a fiery leader who makes plays all over the field. His speed allows him to cover backs and tight ends. He is a sure tackler who always is around the ball.

Outside linebacker Daryl Smith is smart and can make plays sideline to sideline. He excels at bringing down ballcarriers in the open field and is a good defender in zone coverage. Clint Ingram became a starter on the outside as a rookie because Peterson's injury forced Smith to the middle. Ingram immediately made his presence known with bone-jarring hits. He has good instincts but tends to freeze up after he makes a mistake, though that should fade with experience.

Ingram's quick development allows the team to move veteran Nick Greisen to a backup role. Greisen does a good job reading—and, therefore, getting a jump on—plays, but he struggles at times to shed blocks. Also in the backup mix are Jorge Cordova, who is a good pass rusher; Pat Thomas, who started two games last year before being placed on injured reserve; and second-round pick Justin Durant, an athletic small-school player who figures to earn a starting role in the future. **GRADE: B+**

## SECRET WEAPON

## DENNIS NORTHCUTT, WR

The club targeted Northcutt in the free-agent market because he was a player who could help fix many of its offensive woes. He gives the team something it sorely lacked last year—a deep threat to insert in multireceiver sets. Perhaps most important, Northcutt's presence will prevent teams from loading up at the line to stop the run.

JAY DROWNS / JSN

## Paul Spicer, E

**Strengths:** Has good leverage and comes off the ball low and hard. Can hold the point of attack with lower-body power. A high-effort rusher who has a variety of pass-rush moves.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks pure speed and quickness. Isn't a quick-twitch player.

**Bottom line:** Spicer isn't the best athlete on a very good line, but he is the toughest. **Grade: 7.6**

## Reggie Hayward, E

**Strengths:** Explosive first step allows him to shoot the gap. Anticipates the snap count and makes plays in the backfield. Has the athleticism to make plays in space and good range. Plays with a nonstop motor.

**Weaknesses:** Can get engulfed by bigger tackles at the point of attack. Vulnerable against double-teams. Doesn't use his hands all that well and lacks overall strength.

**Bottom line:** He must prove he still has his burst after losing last season to an Achilles' injury. Before that, he had become a productive pass rusher and an improved run defender. **Grade: 7.5**

## Marcus Stroud, T

**Strengths:** Has excellent size and strength and athleticism. Has tools to be dominant. Explosive and has an excellent feel for blocking schemes. Shoots gaps and disrupts. Stout against the run and can split double-teams.

**Weaknesses:** Doesn't play with much fire, which hurts his consistency. Needs more counter moves as a rusher.

**Bottom line:** Stroud couples with John Henderson to make up the most dominating defensive tackle duo in the league. **Grade: 9.3**

## John Henderson, T

**Strengths:** Tall and eats up space inside. An active player who flashes a mean streak. Gets into blockers quickly and can make plays in the backfield. Shows excellent strength against the run. Relentless as a pass rusher.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to improve his awareness of opposing blockers. Can be cut and must protect his lower legs. Needs to do a better job of shedding blocks and making plays.

**Bottom line:** Henderson can dominate a game when he gets a fire lit under him. **Grade: 9.0**

## Mike Peterson, LB

**Strengths:** Aggressive and will chase and make plays all over the field. Has excellent instincts and playmaking ability in the middle. Fluid in coverage and has quickness to get to his spot in the zone. Always around the ball.

**Weaknesses:** Not a physical player. Gets out of position trying to run around blocks. Struggles when in a confined area.

**Bottom line:** Peterson is the leader of a very good defense. He is recovering from a torn pectoral muscle that ended his 2006 season, but he is expected to be at full strength by training camp. **Grade: 8.6**

## Daryl Smith, LB

**Strengths:** Has a good motor and excellent instincts to find the ball. Adept at reading and reacting. An aggressive downhill player who can shoot gaps and make plays in the backfield. Solid speed, range and burst. Good in space.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks overall strength and can struggle near the line. Needs to use his hands better to shed blocks.

**Bottom line:** Smith makes plays all over the field and still is getting better. He has Pro Bowl potential. **Grade: 7.5**

## Clint Ingram, LB

**Strengths:** Has the speed to make plays sideline to sideline. Plays better in the open field. Matches up well with tight ends and backs in coverage. Shows nice run/pass recognition. Drops quickly in coverage.

**Weaknesses:** Gets overwhelmed at the point of attack because of a lack of bulk. Tries to run around blocks. Struggles to shed. Freelances too much.

**Bottom line:** Ingram gained valuable experience as a rookie, when injuries to teammates forced him into the lineup. He is an instinctive player who can be a solid starter. **Grade: 6.8**

## Rashean Mathis, CB

**Strengths:** Plays with poise when teams come after him. Has good quickness and is smooth in his backpedal and can break out of it quickly. Has soft hands. An excellent leaper who is aggressive playing the ball. Has quickness to mirror receivers.

**Weaknesses:** Gets caught peeking in the backfield and loses sight of the receiver. Will occasionally blow coverages. An inconsistent tackler.



## KEY MOVES

### 2007 DRAFT PICKS

Rd.-Pick

GRADE B-

1-21 Reggie Nelson, S, Florida

A dynamic playmaker with solid agility and footwork.

2-48 Justin Durant, ILB, Hampton

Has safety-type speed. Can cover running backs and tight ends.

3-79 Mike Walker, WR, Central Florida

Fears about the stability of his knee have vanished.

4-101 Adam Podlesh, P, Maryland

Specializes in directional punting, a team weakness.

4-113 Brian Smith, DE, Missouri

Could contribute on special teams and as a third-down pass rusher.

5-149 Uche Nwaneri, G, Purdue

The club likes his potential for long-term development.

5-150 Josh Gattis, S, Wake Forest

Will contribute on special teams initially. Eventually could start.

5-166 Derek Landri, DT, Notre Dame

Has a reputation for great hustle. Changes direction quickly.

7-229 John Broussard, WR, San Jose State

Has good speed and decent hands but lacks bulk and strength.

7-251 Chad Nkang, LB, Elon

The team likes his speed and potential as a special teams contributor.

7-252 Andrew Carnahan, OT, Arizona State

Plays with the type of mean streak the team likes.

### VETERAN PLAYERS

**Additions:** S Kevin McCadam (FA/Panthers), WR Dennis Northcutt (FA/Browns), OT Tony Pashos (FA/Ravens), TE Jermaine Wiggins (FA/Vikings).

**Losses:** TE Kyle Brady (FA/Patriots), CB Ahmad Carroll (FA), S Deon Grant (FA/Seahawks), P Chris Hanson (FA/Saints).

**Secondary**—Cornerback Rashean Mathis is the star of the secondary. His most impressive attributes are closing speed and soft hands, and he also has good speed and change-of-direction skills. Mathis comes up with turnovers, but his technique could use work. On the other side, Brian Williams lacks Mathis' ball skills but is aggressive and excels in bump-and-run coverage and run support.

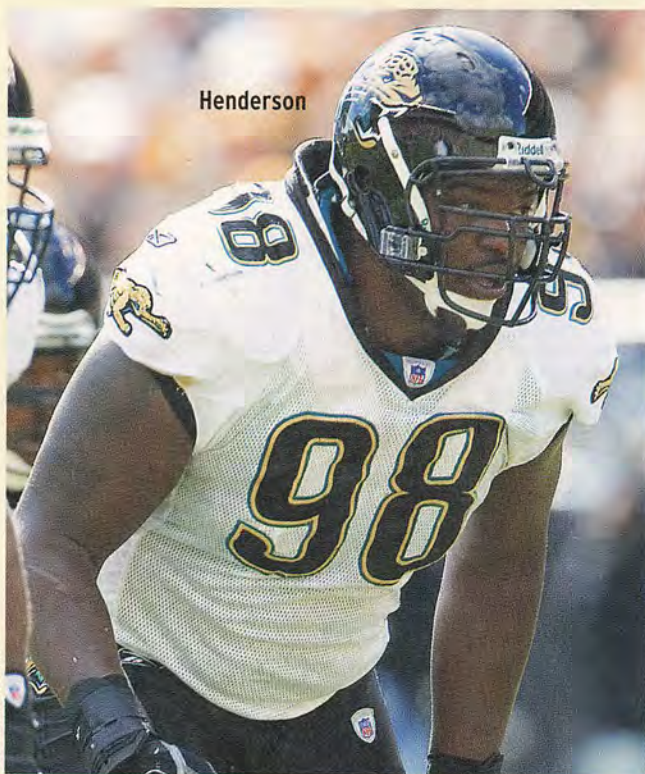
Donovin Darius, another player returning from a season-ending injury, is one of the league's best run-defending safeties. He has the speed to make plays all over the field, but his aggressiveness leaves him susceptible to play-action.

If first-round pick Reggie Nelson adapts quickly to the NFL, he probably will claim the free safety job. If he doesn't, he could help as the nickel back. Nelson's range would be a plus, and he has the speed to excel in two-deep coverage. Nelson will compete against Gerald Sensabaugh, who is explosive and aggressive but needs to improve at diagnosing plays.

There isn't much quality depth at corner. Though injuries are beginning to take their toll on Terry Cousin, 32, he probably will be the nickel back if Nelson isn't. Cousin struggles to keep up with receivers in man-to-man. Reserve corner Scott Starks (5-9, 178) also struggles in man coverage because of his lack of size, but he is fast and aggressive. **GRADE: B**

### SPECIAL TEAMS

This unit's inconsistency and penchant for surrendering big plays cost Pete Rodriguez his job. The new special teams coach



Henderson

BOB LEVERONE / SN

**Bottom line:** Mathis' versatility and physical tools make him a front-line cornerback. **Grade: 8.5**

#### ↑ Brian Williams, CB

**Strengths:** Has the long arms and strength to press receivers. Matches up well with bigger wideouts. Has good leaping ability and is tough on fade routes. Has good ball skills. Strong against the run.

**Weaknesses:** High and stiff in his turns. Can be late diagnosing plays and lacks the fluid hips and speed to make up for it. Takes poor angles and misses tackles.

**Bottom line:** Williams is experienced and versatile. He was a solid starter last season and, after a year in the Jags' system, likely will be better in 2007. **Grade: 7.7**

#### ↑ Donovan Darius, S

**Strengths:** Has good size and strength and a penchant for delivering the big hit. Has excellent feel for the running game. Takes great angles to the ball, has good speed for a safety and rarely misses a tackle.

**Weaknesses:** Doesn't make a lot of plays in the passing game. Slow to react to balls in the air and sometimes gets caught out of position.

**Bottom line:** Darius is one of the league's best and most intimidating strong safeties—when he can stay on the field. He gets hurt a lot. **Grade: 8.0**

#### ↑ Gerald Sensabaugh, S

**Strengths:** Outstanding athlete who has the speed to hold up in coverage. Has good range and instincts. An excellent leaper and a big hitter.

**Weaknesses:** Needs work on his technique. Must wrap up better on tackles.

**Bottom line:** Sensabaugh earned playing time last season and will compete against Nelson for a starting job. He has good upside. **Grade: 7.2**

#### \* Reggie Nelson, S

**Strengths:** Has the size, athleticism and speed to cover tight ends all over the field and is solid covering slot receivers. Does not misread plays and reacts in a blink. Shows closing burst and ability to deliver violent hits.

**Weaknesses:** Sometimes is overaggressive when attacking upfield and, as a result, lunges and misses some tackles.

**Bottom line:** Nelson can immediately upgrade the Jags' secondary with his playmaking ability.



is Joe DeCamillis, whose units consistently ranked among the league's best during his tenure in Atlanta.

Kicker Josh Scobee has a big leg—he had 21 touchbacks last season—but was inconsistent on field-goal attempts. Incumbent punter Chris Hanson was cut after the team used a fourth-round pick on Adam Podlesh, who can drive the ball long distances but has been inconsistent about dropping the ball inside the 20.

## STADIUM/MEDIA

Jacksonville Municipal Stadium  
(67,164, grass)

Tickets: 877-4-JAGS-TIX

Training camp: Jacksonville  
Municipal Stadium, Jacksonville;  
904-633-6000

Radio: WOKV-AM (690); WOKV-  
FM (106.5); WJGL-FM (96.9);  
Jaguars Radio Network

Website: jaguars.com

The speedy Northcutt gives the Jaguars a game-breaking threat at punt returner. He is a dynamic and resourceful open-field runner. Northcutt also could be used on kickoffs so the team can reduce the injury risk for Jones-Drew, who excelled in that role last season. **GRADE: C**

## BOTTOM LINE

This team continues to chase Indianapolis for su-premacy in the AFC South, but the Jaguars won't catch the Colts unless they can overcome their maddening unpredictability and do a better job in close games. Seven of their eight losses last season came by seven points or fewer.

With more consistency from the passing game, a couple of those losses could become wins. The Jags' success hinges on the play of Leftwich; if he is healthy and efficient, they could get in as a wild-card team. But if they make it, don't expect them to stick around long. **SN**

Michael C. Wright covers the Jaguars for the Florida Times-Union.

## PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

### OFFENSE

**QB** ■ Byron Leftwich  
● David Garrard  
**RB** ▲ Fred Taylor  
▲ Maurice Jones-Drew  
**WR** ● Reggie Williams  
● Matt Jones  
**WR** ● Ernest Wilford  
● Matt Jones  
**TE** ■ Jermaine Wiggins  
● George Waghster  
**TE** ● Mercedes Lewis  
● George Waghster  
**LT** ■ Khalif Barnes  
● Maurice Williams  
**LG** ■ Vince Manuwai  
● Dennis Norman  
**C** ■ Brad Meester  
● Dennis Norman  
**RG** ■ Chris Naeole  
● Stockar McDougle  
**RT** ■ Tony Pashos  
● Richard Collier

### DEFENSE

**LE** ■ Reggie Hayward  
■ Bobby McCray  
**LT** ▲ John Henderson  
■ Rob Meier  
**RT** ▲ Marcus Stroud  
● Tony McDaniel  
**RE** ■ Paul Spicer  
● Brent Hawkins  
**SLB** ■ Daryl Smith  
● Nick Greisen  
**MLB** ▲ Mike Peterson  
● Jorge Cordova  
**WLB** ■ Clint Ingram  
● Pat Thomas  
**LCB** ▲ Rashean Mathis  
□ Scott Starks  
**SS** ■ Donovin Darius  
□ Jamaal Fudge  
**FS** ● Reggie Nelson  
● Gerald Sensabaugh  
**RCB** ■ Brian Williams  
● Terry Cousin

### SPECIALISTS

**K** ■ Josh Scobee  
**P** ● Adam Podlesh  
▲ Elite ■ Solid  
● Adequate □ Fringe

Depth charts updated weekly at [sportingnews.com](http://sportingnews.com)



Jones

## JAGUARS ROSTER

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL exp.	College	How acq.	2006 GP/GS
QUARTERBACKS							
9	David Garrard	6-2/244	2/14/78	6	East Carolina	D4a/02	11/10
5	Quinn Gray	6-3/246	5/21/79	4	Florida A&M	FA/03	2/0
7	Byron Leftwich	6-5/245	1/14/80	5	Marshall	D1/03	6/6
RUNNING BACKS							
32	Maurice Jones-Drew	5-7/206	3/23/85	2	UCLA	D2/06	16/1
33	Greg Jones (FB)	6-1/250	4/4/81	4	Florida State	D2/04	0/0
24	Montell Owens	5-10/219	5/4/84	2	Maine	FA/06	14/0
34	Alvin Pearson	5-10/205	8/10/82	3	Virginia	D4/05	13/0
28	Fred Taylor	6-1/226	1/27/76	10	Florida	D1a/98	15/15
22	LaBrandon Toefield	5-11/232	9/24/80	5	LSU	D4b/03	4/0
36	Derrick Wimbush (FB)	6-1/233	8/26/80	3	Fort Valley State	FA/05	12/6
RECEIVERS							
15	John Broussard	6-1/165	12/18/83	R	San Jose State	D7a/07	—
46	Greg Estandia (TE)	6-8/240	11/18/82	1	UNLV	FA/06	0/0
18	Matt Jones	6-6/242	4/22/83	3	Arkansas	D1/05	14/4
89	Mercedes Lewis (TE)	6-6/265	5/19/84	2	UCLA	D1/06	15/3
86	Dennis Northcutt	5-11/171	12/22/77	8	Arizona	FA/07	16/6
17	Charles Sharon	6-0/184	4/4/83	1	Bowling Green	FA/06	0/0
81	Mike Walker	6-2/200	11/1/84	R	Central Florida	D3/07	—
84	Jermaine Wiggins (TE)	6-2/260	1/18/75	8	Georgia	FA/07	16/3
19	Ernest Wilford	6-4/223	1/14/79	4	Virginia Tech	D4/04	16/12
11	Reggie Williams	6-4/214	5/17/83	4	Washington	D1/04	16/14
87	George Waghster (TE)	6-3/260	4/1/81	5	Oregon	D4a/03	16/10
88	Joe Zelenka (LS/TE)	6-3/270	3/9/76	9	Wake Forest	FA/01	16/0
OFFENSIVE LINEMEN							
69	Khalif Barnes (T)	6-5/325	4/21/82	3	Washington	D2/05	15/15
75	Andrew Carnahan (T)	6-8/287	9/8/83	R	Arizona State	D7c/07	—
76	Richard Collier (T)	6-7/358	10/23/81	2	Valdosta State	FA/06	5/0
61	Dan Connolly (C)	6-4/318	9/2/82	2	SE Missouri State	FA/05	0/0
67	Vince Manuwai (G)	6-2/325	7/12/80	5	Hawaii	D3/03	16/16
73	Stockar McDougle (T)	6-6/348	1/11/77	8	Oklahoma	FA/06	11/0
63	Brad Meester (C)	6-3/300	3/23/77	8	Northern Iowa	D2/00	16/16
65	Chris Naeole (G)	6-3/330	12/25/74	11	Colorado	FA/02	16/16
62	Dennis Norman (G/C)	6-5/323	1/26/80	6	Princeton	FA/05	16/1
77	Uche Nwaneri (G)	6-3/300	3/20/84	R	Purdue	D5a/07	—
79	Tony Pashos (T)	6-6/320	8/3/80	5	Illinois	FA/07	16/16
74	Maurice Williams (T)	6-5/310	1/26/79	7	Michigan	FA/05	16/16
DEFENSIVE LINEMEN							
57	Brent Hawkins (E/LB)	6-2/240	9/1/83	2	Illinois State	D5/06	6/0
97	Reggie Hayward (E)	6-5/285	3/14/79	7	Iowa State	FA/05	1/1
98	John Henderson (T)	6-7/328	1/9/79	6	Tennessee	D1/02	16/16
66	Derek Landri (T)	6-3/277	9/21/83	R	Notre Dame	D5c/07	—
93	Bobby McCray (E)	6-6/261	11/1/81	4	Florida	D7/04	15/12
96	Tony McDaniel (T)	6-7/295	1/20/85	2	Tennessee	FA/06	11/0
94	Jeremy Mincey (E)	6-3/260	12/14/83	1	Florida	FA/06	0/0
92	Rob Meier (T)	6-5/293	8/29/77	8	Washington State	D7b/00	16/8
49	Brian Smith (E)	6-4/230	9/16/83	R	Missouri	D4b/07	—
95	Paul Spicer (E)	6-4/296	8/18/75	8	Saginaw Valley	FA/00	16/16
99	Marcus Stroud (T)	6-6/312	6/25/78	7	Georgia	D1/01	11/11
90	James Wyche (E)	6-5/262	4/19/82	2	Syracuse	D7a/06	0/0
LINEBACKERS							
58	Jorge Cordova	6-1/241	9/25/81	4	Nevada	D3/04	13/0
56	Justin Durant	6-2/230	11/21/85	R	Hampton	D2/07	—
50	Tony Gilbert	6-1/244	10/16/79	5	Georgia	FA/03	16/0
55	Nick Greisen	6-1/245	8/10/79	6	Wisconsin	FA/06	16/10
51	Clint Ingram	6-2/244	3/21/83	2	Oklahoma	D3/06	14/11
59	Brian Iwuh	6-0/235	3/8/84	2	Colorado	FA/06	12/0
45	Chad Nkang	6-1/218	7/1/85	R	Elon	D7b/07	—
54	Mike Peterson	6-1/230	6/17/76	9	Florida	FA/03	5/5
56	Kenny Pettway	6-4/238	11/13/82	3	Grambling State	FA/06	7/0
52	Daryl Smith	6-2/244	4/14/82	4	Georgia Tech	D2/04	16/16
53	Pat Thomas	6-2/246	1/26/83	3	N.C. State	D6b/05	2/0
DEFENSIVE BACKS							
21	Terry Cousin (CB)	5-9/185	4/11/75	11	South Carolina	FA/05	10/4
20	Donovin Darius (S)	6-1/225	8/12/75	10	Syracuse	D1b/98	10/10
42	Jamaal Fudge (S)	5-9/196	5/17/83	2	Clemson	FA/06	6/0
40	Josh Gattis (S)	6-1/212	1/15/84	R	Wake Forest	D5b/07	—
27	Rashean Mathis (CB)	6-1/200	8/27/80	5	Bethune-Cookman	D2/03	16/16
47	Kevin McCadam (S)	6-1/219	3/6/79	6	Virginia Tech	FA/07	16/0
42	Reggie Nelson (S)	5-11/198	9/21/83	R	Florida	D1/07	—
38	Chris Roberson (CB)	5-11/185	6/3/83	3	Eastern Michigan	D7/05	0/0
43	Gerald Sensabaugh (S)	6-0/218	6/13/83	3	North Carolina	D5/05	16/7
41	Nick Sorensen (S)	6-3/210	7/31/78	7	Virginia Tech	FA/03	12/0
31	Scott Starks (CB)	5-9/178	6/27/83	3	Wisconsin	D3/05	16/1
23	Demetrius Webb (CB)	5-11/183	12/8/84	2	Florida	D7b/06	11/1
29	Brian Williams (CB)	5-11/198	7/2/79	6	N.C. State	FA/06	15/15
SPECIALISTS							
3	Adam Podlesh (P)	6-0/192	8/11/83	R	Maryland	D4a/07	—
10	Josh Scobee (K)	6-1/190	6/23/82	4	Louisiana Tech	D5a/04	16/0

Abbreviations: D1-draft pick, first round; W-claimed on waivers; T-obtained in trade; FA-free-agent acquisition.

# CHIEFS

**The defense is improving, but the offense might take a step back as it breaks in a new quarterback**

**SN PICK** 3rd, AFC West (8-8)

By ADAM TEICHER

After so many years as an offensive power, the Chiefs are now, officially, on the defensive.

The process started last year with the hiring of defense-minded Herm Edwards as coach. But it really picked up steam this year with the signing of three free-agent defensive starters—linebackers Napoleon Harris and Donnie Edwards and tackle Alfonso Boone.

But even with last season's defensive improvement and the offseason additions, the defense is not yet strong enough to carry the team. Whether the Chiefs can challenge in the AFC West or earn a second straight wild-card berth will depend on how fast a rebuilding offense can get up to speed.

## SCHEDULE

All times Eastern

Sept. 9	at Houston	1:00
Sept. 16	at Chicago	4:15
Sept. 23	MINNESOTA	1:00
Sept. 30	at San Diego	4:15
Oct. 7	JACKSONVILLE	1:00
Oct. 14	CINCINNATI	1:00
Oct. 21	at Oakland	4:05
Oct. 28	Open date	
Nov. 4	GREEN BAY	1:00
Nov. 11	DENVER	1:00
Nov. 18	at Indianapolis	1:00
Nov. 25	OAKLAND	1:00
Dec. 2	SAN DIEGO	1:00
Dec. 9	at Denver	4:15
Dec. 16	TENNESSEE	1:00
Dec. 23	at Detroit	1:00
Dec. 30	at N.Y. Jets	8:15

Strength of schedule: T-5th  
\*Monday

Analysis of every Chiefs game:  
[sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom](http://sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom)

## REGULAR-SEASON WINS



The Chiefs have an unsettled situation at quarterback, which likely will translate—at least early—into problems moving the ball. Young Brodie Croyle will be given every chance to win the starting spot ahead of veteran Damon Huard.

The only veteran offensive addition is starting left tackle Damion McIntosh. Though he will be an upgrade over the departed Jordan Black, he won't be mistaken for Willie Roaf.

## OFFENSE

The offense likely will run more smoothly than it did last season under coordinator Mike Solari, who had never called plays before, but the philosophy won't change in Year 2. The Chiefs will be playing under the confining parameters established by Edwards, who believes in a power running game and the minimizing of turnovers. The Chiefs will feature a liberal dose of running back Larry Johnson and a passing game based on play-action. If Croyle is the quarterback, the team will play even more conservatively. The Chiefs will try to limit his mistakes while building his confidence.

**Quarterbacks**—Younger fans can't even remember the last time the Chiefs went to training camp without a clear-cut starter.

Johnson



MICHAEL McNAMARA / SN ARCHIVES



But that's the situation they face as Croyle prepares to state his case for the job. Edwards would like to resolve the situation not only for this season but for many to come. If Croyle wins the job, that's what would happen; if the Chiefs are forced to go with Huard, the long-term picture will remain hazy.

In the short term, Huard would provide more stability. He filled in nicely for an injured Trent Green last season and played the position the way Edwards and Solari would like their quarterback to. He did a nice job protecting the football, took few chances and threw more accurately than the Chiefs expected.

But Croyle has more upside. He can make all of the necessary throws and has most of the intangibles teams look for in a quarterback. The downside to Croyle is that the Chiefs would have to endure his inevitable growing pains. He missed valuable practice time in training camp and the preseason last year because of an injured shoulder, so his development was delayed. CFL veteran Casey Printers, the No. 3 quarterback, has plenty of athletic ability but struggled to show it in his first NFL season. **GRADE: C-**

**Running backs**—Larry Johnson won't be as busy this season after setting an NFL record with 416 carries. Though Johnson will remain the focus of the Chiefs' power running game, they intend to reduce his burden.

The Chiefs had similar plans last season but became addicted to Johnson, particularly in close games. This year, they intend to make better use of veteran Michael Bennett, who joined the team during training camp last year but was limited by injuries and later was neglected by coaches who never seemed comfortable with his abilities. A full offseason to integrate Bennett into the system apparently has removed lingering doubts.

With Bennett's speed, he provides a nice change of pace to the powerful Johnson. The Chiefs would like to use Bennett in a way similar to how they once used Priest Holmes: They want to get him the ball in the open field on draws, sweeps and screens. They also want to use Johnson more as a receiver and raise his reception total from 41 to somewhere in the 50s.

The Chiefs have no established fullback, which isn't a huge void because they use the position on only about 25 percent of

## SCOUTING REPORTS: OFFENSE

### Brodie Croyle, QB

**Strengths:** A prototypical pocket passer with a strong arm and quick release. Throws a catchable ball and can make all the throws. Has good velocity and can stretch the field. Reads defenses quickly, is smart, makes good decisions and protects the ball.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal size and has been injury-prone. Not a threat to run; isn't elusive in the pocket. Doesn't always feel pressure.

**Bottom line:** Croyle has a strong arm and great intangibles. He's a natural leader who will make plays. But he must get bigger, stronger and faster to stand up to NFL pressure. **Grade: 7.0**

### Damon Huard, QB

**Strengths:** Has a strong arm, size and good mechanics. A smart player who won't make mistakes. Throws accurately on short-to-intermediate routes. Does a good job reading defenses, going through progressions and finding the open man.

**Weaknesses:** Does not have quickness, speed or mobility to buy time in the pocket. Does not throw with velocity and struggles with the deep ball.

**Bottom line:** Huard stepped in as an emergency starter for Trent Green last year and ranked among league leaders in passer rating. He lacks big-play ability, but he's a nice fit for a ball-control offense. **Grade: 6.0**

### Larry Johnson, RB

**Strengths:** A north-south back who runs with a mean streak. Displays power, explosiveness and brute force. Finishes his runs with legs churning and seldom loses yardage. Has top-end speed for a long strider and improved patience as a runner. Has soft hands and catches the ball with ease.

**Weaknesses:** Not real quick. A poor blocker.

**Bottom line:** Johnson could be the best running back in the game if he could—or would—block. Do not be surprised if he eventually crosses that threshold. **Grade: 9.6**

### ↓ Eddie Kennison, WR

**Strengths:** Has good long speed and is a smart route runner. Uses good quickness to escape press coverage; at his best outside the hashes. Can find soft spots in zones. Has good

## FANTASY SOURCE PICKS

### STUD

RB Larry Johnson

### SLEEPER

QB Damon Huard

### STUMBLER

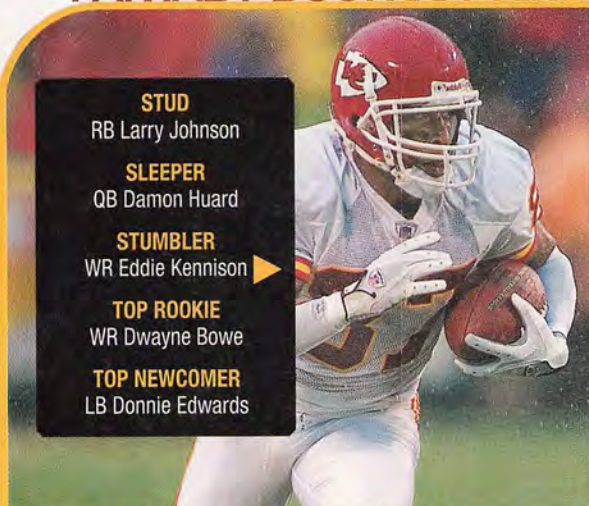
WR Eddie Kennison

### TOP ROOKIE

WR Dwayne Bowe

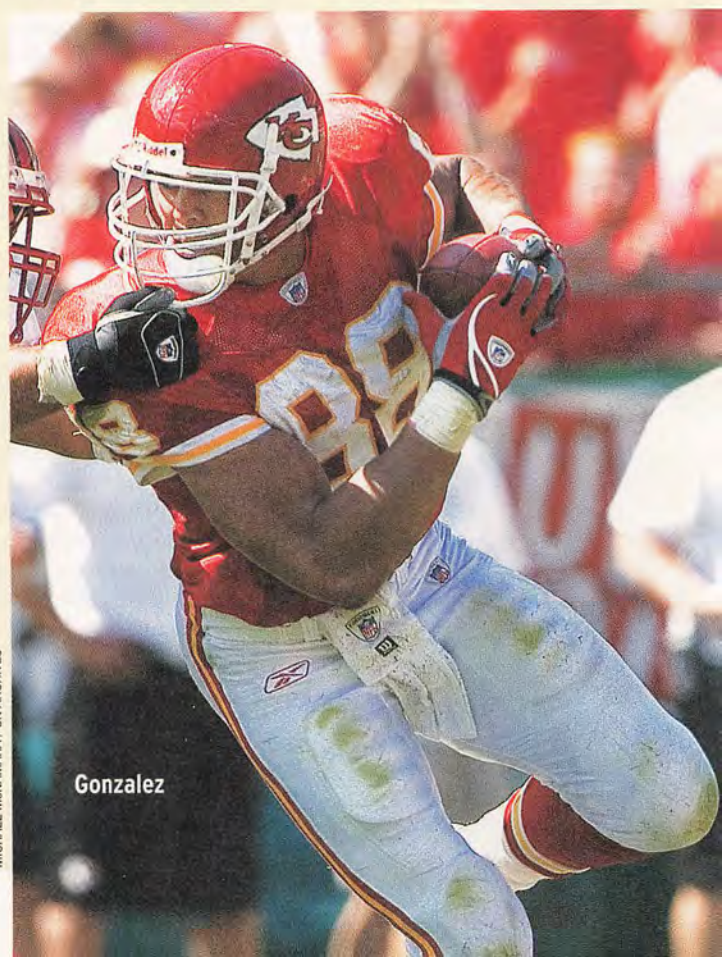
### TOP NEWCOMER

LB Donnie Edwards



Fantasy Source Football is your online fantasy authority.  
Go to [fantasy.sportingnews.com/nfl](http://fantasy.sportingnews.com/nfl).

MATTHEW KUTZ / SN ARCHIVES



MICHAEL McNAMARA / SN ARCHIVES

Gonzalez

Players are graded by War Room scouts on a 1-10 scale.

\*Rookies (not graded)

body control.

**Weaknesses:** Has average hands and is not tough over the middle. Will drop easy passes when he knows a hit is coming. Goes down easily after the catch.

**Bottom line:** Kennison still is a decent starter, but he gets by more on intelligence than pure talent at this stage of his career. He's better suited as a No. 2 or 3 receiver. **Grade: 7.2**

### \*Dwayne Bowe, WR

**Strengths:** Tall with the strength and balance to keep his feet after hard hits. Breaks tackles and fights to the whistle. Runs good routes. Shows quickness and burst out of cuts; can get away on deep routes. Tough and excellent on jump balls.

**Weaknesses:** Must catch passes more consistently with his hands. Not a game-breaker.

**Bottom line:** Bowe surprises defenders with his quickness, athleticism and speed. He will be a productive possession guy who can dominate in the red zone.

### Tony Gonzalez, TE

**Strengths:** An excellent athlete with soft and exceptional hands. Has good concentration and is tough in a crowd. Has good leaping ability and gets off the line quickly with downfield speed. A good route runner who uses his body to shield defenders.

**Weaknesses:** Can be held up at the line. Doesn't always block well or work to improve that facet of his game.

**Bottom line:** Gonzalez still is a versatile playmaker. He's the Chiefs' go-to guy, a receiver who can change the momentum of a game. He's extra dangerous in the red zone. **Grade: 9.5**

### Damion McIntosh, T

**Strengths:** Has bulk, adequate height and body control. Uses his long arms and big wingspan to engulf opponents. Technically sound; knows his assignments and positions himself well. Has adequate body control.

**Weaknesses:** A so-so athlete who is not effective in space. Has trouble reaching the second level and stopping speed rushers. Plays top-heavy with marginal speed.

**Bottom line:** McIntosh has started a lot of games but has never become a top-line player. He's better as a backup swing tackle. **Grade: 6.7**

### Chris Terry, T

**Strengths:** Has good size and strength. A good run blocker when healthy and focused. A good athlete who plays with a solid base and gets into pass sets quickly.

**Weaknesses:** Has not played a lot over the last three seasons for a variety of reasons.

**Bottom line:** Terry, once a promising prospect, has been sidetracked by off-field problems. Though he saw limited action in 2006, he will get a chance to earn a starting job on K.C.'s restructured line. **Grade: 6.0**

### ↑ Brian Waters, G

**Strengths:** Has good strength and toughness and can be dominant. A mauling, physical run blocker who plays with a mean streak. Makes strong initial contact. Has good leverage and pop, a strong upper body and the hands to grab and control.

**Weaknesses:** Can be stiff and a little straight-legged after contact. Often relies on mauling more than technique.

**Bottom line:** Waters is a throwback who can be just plain nasty. He can eliminate his opponent. **Grade: 8.4**

### John Welbourn, G

**Strengths:** Has size, strength and body power with a strong punch. Plays with strong hands and can lock out and steer defenders. Has good lateral quickness. Plays with good balance and stays square to the line. Explosive as a run blocker; plays with nastiness.

**Weaknesses:** Will bend at his waist when he's facing speed rushers and can be beaten to the edge. Gets lazy late in games.

**Bottom line:** Welbourn, who has been asked to play out of position at right tackle, could be an upper-tier guard. **Grade: 7.0**

### ↑ Casey Wiegmann, C

**Strengths:** Tough, smart and scrappy. Plays with leverage and is mobile enough to snap and pull. Can move in space and connect. Has good lateral quickness and awareness.

**Weaknesses:** Undersized. Base is too wide when blocking in-line. Gives ground against bull rushers.

**Bottom line:** Wiegmann has been the unsung hero on the Chiefs' line. He plays tough and under control, and his football intelligence allows him to make blocks and avoid mistakes. **Grade: 7.7**

**KEY:** ↑ Ascending ↓ Descending

## INSIDERS POLL

5

Larry Johnson is headed for:

A 2,000-yard season

14

Another 400-carry season

13

The trainers room from being overworked

Based on a poll of SN's 32 team correspondents

the snaps. The lead blocker for Johnson in goal-line and short-yardage situations is likely to be converted linebacker Boomer Grigsby, though Kris Wilson filled that role most of last season. Wilson, who lacks the blocking ability to do that job full time, is better suited to go in motion and catch passes. **GRADE: A**

**Receivers**—Tight end Tony Gonzalez, 31, is showing no signs of declining skills. His numbers were down slightly last season, but that's more a reflection on pass protection and quarterback problems than on Gonzalez. Look for him to lead the Chiefs in receptions again.

Likewise, go-to wide receiver Eddie Kennison is 34 but coming off another productive season. His numbers also were down, but he was the player most affected by the Chiefs' decision to take fewer chances downfield. He still contributed more big plays than any other receiver.

The decision to draft Dwayne Bowe in the first round was a good first step toward energizing the receivers unit. Look for Bowe to get plenty of playing time as a rookie and maybe even join Kennison in the starting lineup. Bowe catches the ball well in traffic and could be a factor in the red zone. He also is a big-play threat because he runs well after the catch.

Others in the receiving mix are Samie Parker and Jeff Webb, neither of whom has established himself. Parker is a two-year

## BOLD PREDICTIONS

**1** Despite their intentions to do a better job of preserving Larry Johnson, the Chiefs will hand him the ball close to 400 times. The coaches are addicted to their bruising back.

**2** Brodie Croyle will win the starting quarterback job and the Chiefs will suffer the inevitable growing pains that go along with using a young player at such an important position.

**3** Defensive end Tamba Hali will become an elite player in his second season. He is much more aware now of what it takes to become a top performer each week.

starter but hasn't produced enough big plays. Webb, who played only sparingly last season, has good size and speed and could get a long look in the fall. Jason Dunn is the top reserve at tight end. He is a powerful blocker with limited ability as a receiver. Wilson is a better alternative when the Chiefs use two tight ends in passing situations. **GRADE: C+**

**Line**—After ranking among the league's best units for several seasons, the line showed serious cracks last year, mainly at tackle. The Chiefs made a couple of offseason moves to address the problem.

The first was to sign former Dolphin McIntosh to be their starter on the left side. Though McIntosh will never be a Pro Bowler, he is a tough, physical player with experience against some of the league's best pass rushers. He will provide a greater sense of security than the team had last season. The other was to promote former Seahawks and Panthers starter Chris Terry into the lineup at right tackle. A midseason addition last year, Terry is a good athlete who could provide stability at a position that was handled by four different players with varying results last season.

John Welbourn will get the first shot at replacing Will Shields at right guard. It won't be easy. Welbourn is not nearly as athletic as Shields, who retired after 14 seasons and 12 Pro Bowl selections. Shields excelled at getting downfield on sweeps, screens and draws. Welbourn is more of a mauler who is tough at the point of attack.

Left guard Brian Waters and center Casey Wiegmann will be the centerpieces of the line—dependable, athletic and intelligent blockers who are solid in pass protection.

There is plenty of veteran depth. Welbourn has started at both guard and right tackle. Chris Bober has experience at center and guard. Kevin Sampson can fill in at tackle. And the Chiefs like the potential of tackle Will Svitek, who could develop into a starter. **GRADE: B-**

## DEFENSE

The Chiefs will stay with Edwards' cover 2 system, but the free-agent additions give coordinator Gunther Cunningham flexibility. In Harris, Edwards and Derrick Johnson, Cunningham has three linebackers who can stay on the field in all situations. A fourth, Kendrell Bell, has pass-rush skills, which opens the possibility of using a 3-4 as a change of pace.

## SECRET WEAPON

### DERRICK JOHNSON, LB

His path to becoming an elite outside linebacker was cleared with the offseason addition of Donnie Edwards and Napoleon Harris. Their presence will allow Johnson to show off his complete skill package. If Johnson is allowed to go after the quarterback more frequently, he could challenge for the team lead in sacks.



MICHAEL MCNAMARA / SN ARCHIVES

## SCOUTING REPORTS: DEFENSE

### ↑ Tamba Hali, E

**Strengths:** Explosive and plays with a low center of gravity. Has good burst and gets off the snap quickly. Plays with pop and uses upper-body strength to avoid getting engulfed. Holds ground at the point of attack. A relentless pass rusher with double moves.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal height and elite speed. Not powerful enough to bull rush. Must learn to use hands better.

**Bottom line:** Hali is a complete end, accomplished at both defending the run and rushing the passer. He was impressive as a rookie and will only get better. **Grade: 7.8**

### Jared Allen, E

**Strengths:** Intense; goes all out all the time. Loves the game. A relentless pass rusher with active hands. Has long arms and can counter and shed blocks. Active against the run with good instincts. Can penetrate and make plays.

**Weaknesses:** Wears down in run defense. Lacks the bulk to stack double-team blocks. Must become more consistent as a tackler. Suspended for the first four games this season.

**Bottom line:** Allen plays the game with passion. But he must get stronger in the lower body and improve against the run to move to the upper echelon of ends. **Grade: 7.7**

### Ron Edwards, T

**Strengths:** Has a huge frame and is a good athlete with quickness and agility. Extremely mobile and fast for his size. Has the burst to get through the line and disrupt plays. Has a decent work ethic.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks strength. Seldom collapses a pocket. Plays too erect and gets knocked backward. Most effective when on the move.

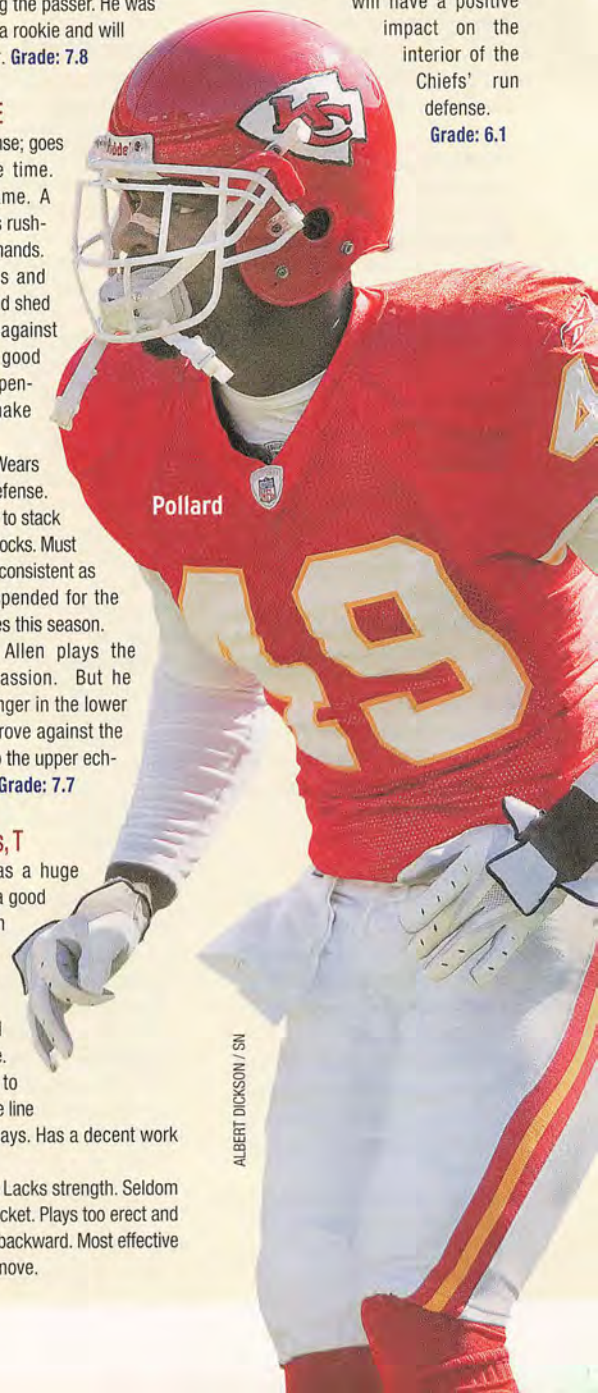
**Bottom line:** Edwards is an underrated player who needs to improve his consistency and strength. **Grade: 6.5**

### Alfonso Boone, T

**Strengths:** Has good size, aggressiveness and quickness. A high-energy player with awareness and diagnostic skills. Plays with balance.

**Weaknesses:** Has a soft body; needs leverage to hold the point of attack.

**Bottom line:** Boone has made strides each year as a player and finally will get a chance to be a starter. His size will have a positive impact on the interior of the Chiefs' run defense. **Grade: 6.1**



ALBERT DICKSON / SN



## SCOUT TAKES

## A scout from another team sizes up the Chiefs

If there is a running back in this league who can withstand that many carries (an NFL-record 416 in 2006), it's **Larry Johnson**. Not only is he big and powerful, but he also has the speed and agility to avoid some of those bigger collisions. ... Among the new guys on defense, **Donnie Edwards** will make the biggest impact. He's always been very durable. On top of that, he's very smart and extremely instinctive. ...

**Damon Huard** proved last year he can come in and manage the offense and not mess things up. He's not a **Peyton Manning** or the athlete **Michael Vick** is, but he made the right reads and threw the ball in the right spots. ... Losing **Will Shields** will definitely hurt them. **Damion McIntosh** was a good signing—he'll be better than what they had at tackle last year—but he's not going to cure all their ailments up front.



MARC PISCOTTY FOR SN

**Line**—The biggest problem last season was the lack of an inside pass rush. So the Chiefs signed Boone, a former Bears backup who has a quick first step and is more powerful than any of last season's starters.

A better inside rush could increase the production of the ends. Both Tamba Hali and Jared Allen played well last season but were frustrated when opposing quarterbacks had time to step up in the pocket and avoid sacks. Allen and Hali are high-energy players who frequently make tackles from sheer effort. They will only get better as they gain experience, improve their techniques and get help up the middle.

Hali will find out early whether that help is on the way, but Allen was suspended for the first four games for two offseason transgressions. In his absence, the team will find out whether second-round pick Claude McBride can provide the pass-rush savvy he displayed at Tennessee.

McBride also will add to the depth inside, something that was lacking last season and forced the Chiefs to play their starters more than they wanted. One of those starters, Ron Edwards, played well last year and was re-signed in the offseason. Another, James Reed, likely will benefit from his move into a more comfortable backup role. Jimmy Wilkerson also decided to come back and will provide depth at both tackle and end.

The Chiefs also hope to get immediate inside help from another draft pick—third-round tackle DeMarcus "Tank" Tyler from N.C. State. **GRADE: C**

**Linebackers**—Johnson, Harris and Edwards fit well in the cover 2. In the middle, Harris is a big, physical player who can take on blockers in the running game and run well enough to be a factor in the passing game. Johnson and Edwards, who has returned after five years in San Diego, are athletic players who can run, play in space and cover receivers.

Their versatility creates opportunities. Each is capable of playing in obvious running or passing situations. The Chiefs may opt

**Donnie Edwards, LB**

**Strengths:** Has good speed and range. Smart, instinctive and always around the ball. Anticipates well and consistently beats blockers to spots. Reads quarterbacks' eyes and gets excellent jumps on underneath routes. Has good ball skills and plays with leverage. An effective blitzer.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal strength and stack-and-shed ability. Can get gobbled up at the line. Doesn't always finish tackles.

**Bottom line:** Edwards, who returns to Kansas City after an excellent five years in San Diego, remains productive despite his age. He's still a premier playmaker, leader and clutch performer. **Grade: 7.8**

**↑ Derrick Johnson, LB**

**Strengths:** Has great speed, instincts and agility; excels at changing direction. Always hustles and is relentless in pursuit. Takes smart angles to the ball and makes sound tackles.

**Weaknesses:** Not a "take on" player. Would rather jump around blockers than face them.

**Bottom line:** Johnson is a good young player with excellent physical tools.

He will continue to get better.

**Grade: 7.5**

**↑ Napoleon Harris, LB**

**Strengths:** Has excellent size, strength and initial pop. Can stack and shed but is more effective slipping blocks. Has sideline-to-sideline range and a great closing burst. Can match up in man-to-man and is a reliable tackler.

**Weaknesses:** Has durability issues. Lacks ball skills and instincts on the blitz.

**Bottom line:** Harris, who is best playing in space, will be free to run to the ball and make plays in K.C.'s attacking 4-3. This could be a big year for him. **Grade: 7.0**

**Ty Law, CB**

**Strengths:** Opens hips quickly in turn-and-run situations and can handle himself isolated in coverage. Plays with confidence and a mean streak. Can jam receivers at the line and muscle them off routes. Has good footwork, changes direction quickly

and can blanket receivers underneath. Has good burst and is a playmaker.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks elite speed and discipline. Can be overaggressive and is vulnerable to play-action and pump fakes. Has lost a step.

**Bottom line:** Law is still near the top of his game and proved so last season. **Grade: 8.0**

**↓ Patrick Surtain, CB**

**Strengths:** Very athletic; explodes out of cuts and can blanket receivers underneath. Can recover from mistakes. Shows good awareness and has the height to compete for jump balls. Has playmaking ball skills and body control.

**Weaknesses:** Can be overaggressive. Vulnerable to double moves and pump fakes. Not strong enough to muscle receivers.

**Bottom line:** Surtain is aging and is not the playmaker he once was. He needs to play with more discipline. **Grade: 7.3**

**Greg Wesley, S**

**Strengths:** Has great physical tools and ball skills. Good in the box or in the deep third of the field. Shows awareness and the ability to make big plays. Can backpedal and keep depth. Blitzes well off the edge.

**Weaknesses:** Gets out of position. Plays too upright, bites on play-action and can be clumsy in his backpedal. Does not always hustle.

**Bottom line:** Wesley is a good player but lacks the fundamentals, effort and consistency to be considered among the best safeties in the league. **Grade: 7.5**

**↑ Bernard Pollard, S**

**Strengths:** Has size and speed and is willing in run support and comfortable in the box. Has the strength to shed blocks and strong diagnostic skills. A big hitter who tackles well in the open field and can separate receivers from the ball. Has range and can cover the deep half in zone schemes.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks quickness and change-of-direction skills. Stiff in the hips and can't turn and run with receivers. Not strong in one-on-one coverage.

**Bottom line:** Pollard, a big, physical player, made an impact as a rookie and has the tools to be a solid starter for the foreseeable future. **Grade: 7.4**



to use all three on running downs or tailor their substitution pattern to a given situation.

Johnson is a two-year starter; Edwards and Harris are free-agent additions. Their arrival pushes Bell, a former starter on the outside, into a backup role alongside Keyaron Fox and Rich Scanlon. Bell will remain prominent as a rusher in obvious passing situations. Fox is young, athletic and capable of filling in at either outside position. **GRADE: B+**

**Secondary**—The Chiefs need to get at least one more season from aging cornerbacks Ty Law and Patrick Surtain. Both are long on experience and savvy but short on the speed the Chiefs want from their corners. But there are few alternatives.

Benny Sapp has played some as a nickel back and could win that role again, but he is small and valued more for his ability to blitz from the slot than for his coverage skills. Marcus Maxey, a fifth-round pick last year, has ability but needs time to develop.

## STADIUM/MEDIA

Arrowhead Stadium

(79,451, grass)

Tickets: 816-920-9400

Training camp: University of

Wisconsin-River Falls;

715-425-4580

Radio: KCFX-FM (101)

Website: kcchiefs.com

The safety situation looks solid. The Chiefs have three starting candidates in Greg Wesley and second-year players Bernard Pollard and Jarrod Page.

Free safety Wesley is capable of making Pro Bowl-type plays with his range and instincts, but he's inconsistent. Pollard provides the physical play the team has lacked in its secondary. He does not run as well as Page or Wesley, but he's more effective against the run. Page played extensively as a rookie and was difficult to fool. Page has speed, instincts and ball skills but needs to improve his tackling. **GRADE: C+**

## SPECIAL TEAMS

Dustin Colquitt is one of the best punters in the league, and the field goal kicking will get an upgrade if fifth-round pick Justin Medlock can beat out Lawrence Tynes and provide more consistency.

Colquitt consistently hits high, arching kicks that are difficult to field and easy for teammates to cover. Colquitt added distance to his punts last season, usually without sacrificing hang time or height.

Medlock will need a good training camp to win the kicking job, but the Chiefs believe his upside is better accuracy and longer kickoffs. Tynes has good enough range to hit from 50 yards but will miss inexplicably from shorter distances.

Jeff Webb will replace Dante Hall as the kickoff return man. Webb showed promise in limited duty as a rookie last year. With no obvious candidates to return punts, Kennison could be asked to reprise a role he excelled at early in his career. **GRADE: B-**

## BOTTOM LINE

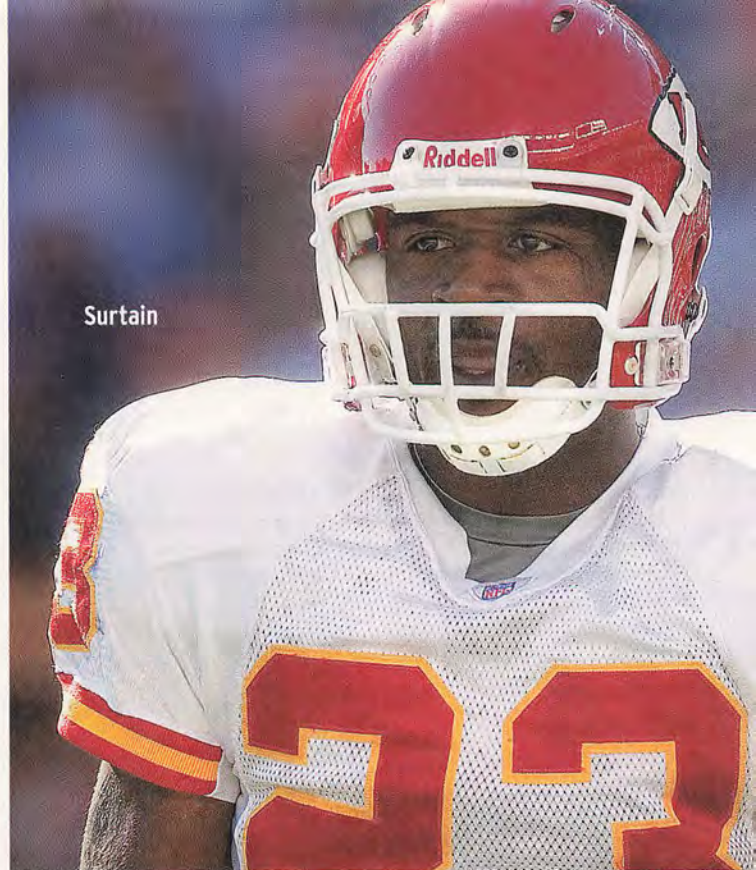
The Chiefs aren't far from being a contender in the AFC West, but everything would have to fall in place quickly. Foremost in the equation is the play at quarterback. The Chiefs need Croyle or Huard to seize the starting role and provide a steady hand. Everything could unravel quickly if neither takes command. The team also needs its defensive additions to make an impact.

If those things happen and the Chiefs stay healthy at key positions, they could stay in the race. But it might be more realistic to expect some bumps in the road and maybe a run at another wild-card spot.

SN

Adam Teicher covers the Chiefs for the Kansas City Star.

Surtain



## KEY MOVES

### 2007 DRAFT PICKS

Rd.-Pick

**GRADE B-**

**1-23 Dwayne Bowe, WR, LSU**

Not a burner but makes big plays with his ability to run after the catch.

**2-54 Claude McBride, DL, Tennessee**

Could start immediately because of Jared Allen's suspension.

**3-82 DeMarcus Tyler, DT, N.C. State**

Can be disruptive in the backfield with his great burst.

**5-148 Kolby Smith, RB, Louisville**

Versatile insurance policy; likely will play on special teams.

**5-160 Justin Medlock, K, UCLA**

Accurate leg, good on kickoffs; could unseat incumbent Lawrence Tynes.

**6-196 Herbert Taylor, OT, TCU**

Four-year college starter; eventually could move to guard.

**7-231 Michael Allan, TE, Whitworth**

Strictly a developmental prospect.

### VETERAN PLAYERS

**Additions:** DT Alfonso Boone (FA/Bears), LS J.P. Darche (FA/Seahawks), LB Donnie Edwards (FA/Chargers), LB Napoleon Harris (FA/Vikings), S Jon McGraw (FA/Lions), OT Damion McIntosh (FA/Dolphins).

**Losses:** OT Jordan Black (FA/Texans), LS Kendall Gammon (FA), WR Dante Hall (trade/Rams), DT Eric Hicks (FA), S Sammy Knight (FA), LB Kawika Mitchell (FA/Giants), DT James Reed (FA), DT Ryan Sims (trade/Buccaneers), OT Kyle Turley (FA), CB Lenny Walls (FA/Rams).

## PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
QB	● Brodie Croyle ● Damon Huard	LE	■ Tamba Hali ● Jimmy Wilkerson
FB	● Kris Wilson □ Boomer Grigsby	LT	● Alfonso Boone ● James Reed
RB	▲ Larry Johnson ● Michael Bennett	RT	● Ron Edwards ● DeMarcus Tyler
WR	● Dwayne Bowe ● Samie Parker	RE	▲ Jared Allen ● Claude McBride
WR	■ Eddie Kennison ● Jeff Webb	SLB	■ Derrick Johnson ● Keyaron Fox
TE	▲ Tony Gonzalez ● Jason Dunn	MLB	■ Napoleon Harris ● Rich Scanlon
LT	● Damion McIntosh □ Will Svitek	WLB	■ Donnie Edwards ● Kendrell Bell
LG	▲ Brian Waters ● John Welbourn	LCB	■ Patrick Surtain □ Benny Sapp
C	■ Casey Wiegmann ● Chris Bober	SS	● Bernard Pollard ● Jon McGraw
RG	● John Welbourn ● Chris Bober	FS	■ Greg Wesley ● Jarrad Page
RT	● Chris Terry ● Kevin Sampson	RCB	■ Ty Law □ Marcus Maxey

## SPECIALISTS

K	● Justin Medlock	KR	● Jeff Webb
P	▲ Dustin Colquitt	PR	■ Eddie Kennison
		LS	■ J.P. Darche

▲ Elite ■ Solid ● Adequate □ Fringe

Depth charts updated weekly at [sportingnews.com](http://sportingnews.com)

## CHIEFS ROSTER

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL exp.	College	How acq.	2006 GP/GS
QUARTERBACKS							
12	Brodie Croyle	6-2/206	2/6/83	2	Alabama	D3/06	2/0
10	Trent Green	6-3/217	7/9/70	14	Indiana	T-Sil/01	8/8
11	Damon Huard	6-3/215	7/9/73	11	Washington	FA/04	10/8
4	Omar Jacobs	6-4/232	3/3/84	1	Bowling Green	FA/07	0/0
7	Casey Printers	6-2/222	5/16/81	1	Florida A&M	FA/06	0/0
RUNNING BACKS							
26	Michael Bennett	5-9/209	8/13/78	7	Wisconsin	T-NO/06	11/0
46	Boomer Grigsby (FB)	5-11/249	11/15/81	3	Illinois State	D5a/05	15/0
43	Greg Hanoian (FB)	6-2/263	12/9/81	1	Syracuse	FA/07	0/0
31	Priest Holmes	5-9/213	10/7/73	11	Texas	FA/01	0/0
27	Larry Johnson	6-1/230	11/19/79	5	Penn State	D1/03	16/16
39	Derrick Ross	5-10/226	12/29/83	2	Tarleton State	FA/06	6/0
21	Kolby Smith	5-11/219	12/15/84	R	Louisville	D5a/07	—
RECEIVERS							
47	Michael Allan (TE)	6-6/254	9/8/83	R	Whitworth	D7/07	—
82	Dwayne Bowe	6-2/221	9/21/84	R	LSU	D1/07	—
89	Jason Dunn (TE)	6-6/276	11/15/73	11	Eastern Kentucky	FA/00	15/5
85	Rod Gardner	6-2/219	10/26/77	7	Clemson	FA/06	14/0
88	Tony Gonzalez (TE)	6-5/251	2/27/76	11	California	D1/97	15/15
81	Chris Hannon	6-3/205	2/18/84	1	Tennessee	FA/06	0/0
87	Eddie Kennison	6-1/201	1/20/73	12	LSU	FA/01	16/16
18	Samie Parker	5-11/190	3/25/81	4	Oregon	D4a/04	16/15
80	Jeff Webb	6-2/211	1/31/82	2	San Diego State	D6b/06	10/0
48	Keith Willis (TE)	6-6/260	12/14/80	1	Virginia Tech	FA/07	0/0
84	Kris Wilson (TE)	6-2/251	8/22/81	4	Pittsburgh	D2b/04	16/10
OFFENSIVE LINEMEN							
67	Chris Bober (T)	6-5/310	12/24/76	8	Nebraska-Omaha	FA/04	16/2
51	Jean-Philippe Darche (LS)	6-0/242	2/28/75	8	McGill	FA/07	1/0
73	Rob Hunt (G)	6-4/301	3/3/81	1	North Dakota State	FA/07	0/0
77	Damion McIntosh (T)	6-4/328	3/25/77	8	Kansas State	FA/07	13/13
64	Rudy Niswanger (C)	6-5/301	11/9/82	2	LSU	FA/06	4/0
75	Ramiro Pruneda (T)	6-6/317	1/25/83	1	Monterrey Tech	FA/07	0/0
79	Kevin Sampson (T)	6-4/312	6/19/81	4	Syracuse	D7/04	6/6
61	Tre Stallings (T)	6-3/315	1/8/83	2	Mississippi	D6a/06	0/0
71	Will Svitek (T)	6-6/300	1/8/82	3	Stanford	D6a/05	2/0
65	Herbert Taylor (T)	6-3/295	9/22/84	R	TCU	D6/07	—
60	Chris Terry (T)	6-5/295	8/8/75	8	Georgia	FA/06	7/0
54	Brian Waters (G)	6-3/318	2/18/77	8	North Texas	FA/00	14/14
76	John Welbourn (T)	6-5/310	3/30/76	9	California	T-Phi/04	9/4
62	Casey Wiegmann (C)	6-2/285	7/20/73	12	Iowa	FA/01	16/16
DEFENSIVE LINEMEN							
69	Jared Allen (E)	6-6/265	4/3/82	4	Idaho State	D4b/04	16/16
70	Alfonso Boone (T)	6-4/318	1/11/76	7	Mt. San Antonio JC	FA/00	12/4
95	Ron Edwards (T)	6-3/320	7/12/79	7	Texas A&M	FA/06	16/16
91	Tamba Hali (E)	6-3/275	11/3/83	2	Penn State	D1/06	16/16
90	Claude McBride (E)	6-2/278	5/30/85	R	Tennessee	D2/07	—
72	Montez Murphy (E)	6-6/256	1/6/82	2	Baylor	FA/07	1/0
92	James Reed (T)	6-0/286	2/3/77	7	Iowa State	FA/06	15/15
93	DeMarcus Tyler (T)	6-2/306	2/14/85	R	N.C. State	D3/07	—
96	Jimmy Wilkerson (E)	6-2/280	1/4/81	5	Oklahoma	D6/03	13/1
LINEBACKERS							
99	Kendrell Bell	6-1/245	7/2/78	7	Georgia	FA/05	16/14
59	Donnie Edwards	6-2/227	4/6/73	12	UCLA	FA/07	16/16
57	Keyaron Fox	6-3/235	1/24/82	4	Georgia Tech	D3/04	16/4
53	Kris Griffin	6-3/240	5/27/81	3	Indiana (Pa.)	FA/05	16/0
50	Napoleon Harris	6-3/253	2/25/79	6	Northwestern	FA/07	14/14
56	Derrick Johnson	6-3/242	11/22/82	3	Texas	D1/05	13/12
52	William Kershaw	6-3/240	12/15/83	2	Maryland	FA/06	1/0
57	Nick Reid	6-3/234	11/18/83	1	Kansas	FA/07	0/0
55	Rich Scanlon	6-2/249	12/23/80	4	Syracuse	FA/04	9/0
94	Timi Wusu	6-2/219	6/10/83	1	Stanford	FA/07	0/0
DEFENSIVE BACKS							
38	Michael Bragg (CB)	6-1/190	12/31/81	1	Tex. A&M-Kingsville	FA/06	4/0
48	Robb Butler (S)	6-0/200	9/14/81	2	Robert Morris	FA/07	0/0
24	Ty Law (CB)	5-11/200	2/10/74	13	Michigan	FA/06	16/16
45	Marcus Maxey (CB)	6-0/192	2/2/83	2	Miami	D5/06	2/0
47	Jon McGraw (S)	6-3/206	4/2/79	6	Kansas State	FA/07	—
41	Zach Norton (CB)	5-11/185	11/19/81	3	Cincinnati	FA/07	0/0
44	Jarrad Page (S)	6-0/225	10/19/84	2	UCLA	D7/06	16/12
39	Dimitri Patterson (CB)	5-10/190	6/18/83	3	Tuskegee	FA/07	0/0
40	Justin Phinisee (CB)	5-11/199	4/10/83	1	Oregon	FA/07	0/0
49	Bernard Pollard (S)	6-1/224	12/23/84	2	Purdue	D2/06	16/0
20	Benny Sapp (CB)	5-9/190	1/20/81	4	Northern Iowa	FA/04	11/0
23	Patrick Surtain (CB)	5-11/192	6/19/76	10	Southern Miss	T-Mia/05	16/16
25	Greg Wesley (S)	6-2/206	3/19/78	8	Arkansas-Pine Bluff	D3/00	14/14
SPECIALISTS							
2	Dustin Colquitt (P)	6-3/207	5/6/82	3	Tennessee	D3/05	16/0
8	Justin Medlock (K)	5-11/201	10/23/83	R	UCLA	D5b/07	—
1	Lawrence Tynes (K)	6-1/202	5/3/78	4	Troy	FA/04	16/0

Abbreviations: D1-draft pick, first round; W-claimed on waivers; T-obtained in trade; FA-free-agent acquisition.



MARC PISCOTTY FOR SN

JAY DROWNS / SN

# DOLPHINS

**Despite a lights-out defense, the Dolphins still might be a long way from turning things around**

**SN PICK** 4th, AFC East (5-11)

By JEFF DARLINGTON

**A**mid a chorus of boos, a fan in the crowd at the Dolphins' draft-day party had his thumb pointed down when coach Cam Cameron requested he turn it around.

"We need that thumb to go this direction," said Cameron, indicating up.

Perhaps that's easier said than done. Before Cameron could even call a play, the new head coach already found himself facing the South Florida heat. The reaction to the team's decision not to draft quarterback Brady Quinn illustrates the fans' growing impatience with this franchise.

After five consecutive seasons without a playoff appearance, fans still are craving results. And despite the unfavorable reaction to Cameron's first major decision, he may be the person to provide those results.

Cameron's role is simply stated but hardly easy: If he complements one of the league's most ferocious defenses with an offense that puts some points on the board, those thumbs will be pointing toward the sky.

## OFFENSE

There is a reason Cameron didn't hire an offensive coordinator when he assembled his staff. Quite frankly, he didn't find anyone who could call plays better than he could. Cameron knows he was hired by Miami because of his success as the Chargers' offensive coordinator, and he will employ an attack that's both risky and calculated. His system relies on deep passes as much as pounding runs.

**Quarterbacks**—The Dolphins still haven't found security at this position, and it will continue to haunt them until they do. The team's interest this spring in landing the Chiefs' Trent Green, who has the critical decision-making skills Cameron wants, probably says enough about its faith in Daunte Culpepper.

As the team continued to prepare for the season, though, it had to focus its attention on the rehabilitation of Culpepper's right knee and the development of fourth-year player Cleo Lemon and rookie John Beck, the team's

## SCHEDULE

All times Eastern

Sept. 9	at Washington	1:00
Sept. 16	DALLAS	4:05
Sept. 23	at N.Y. Jets	1:00
Sept. 30	OAKLAND	1:00
Oct. 7	at Houston	1:00
Oct. 14	at Cleveland	1:00
Oct. 21	NEW ENGLAND	1:00
Oct. 28	vs. N.Y. GIANTS	1:00
Nov. 4	Open date	
Nov. 11	BUFFALO	1:00
Nov. 18	at Philadelphia	1:00
Nov. 26	at Pittsburgh*	8:30
Dec. 2	N.Y. JETS	1:00
Dec. 9	at Buffalo	1:00
Dec. 16	BALTIMORE	1:00
Dec. 23	at New England	1:00
Dec. 30	CINCINNATI	1:00

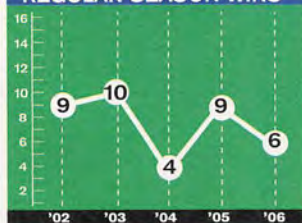
Strength of schedule: T-8th

\*Monday

§in London

Analysis of every Dolphins game:  
[sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom](http://sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom)

## REGULAR-SEASON WINS





second-round pick.

If Culpepper sticks around, the goal is to boost his explosiveness. In his four starts last season, Culpepper was sacked 21 times. The line was partly to blame, but make no mistake, Culpepper isn't as mobile as he once was, which caused him to throw too many ill-advised passes. The team will try to put him in situations where any risks he takes are less damaging.

Beck, who could be groomed as the heir to the starting job, probably will compete with Lemon to be top backup. Beck lacks ideal size (6-2, 215) and arm strength but makes good reads and is accurate on short and intermediate routes. Lemon has a compact throwing motion and the raw skills to develop into an impact player, but he needs work, particularly on his accuracy. **GRADE: D**

**Running backs**—The team probably will be more flexible with its use of Ronnie Brown. It will mix in runs to the edges with up-the-middle carries to keep defenses on their toes. Brown's size (6-0, 233) is an asset, but he needs to keep his weight down to maintain his speed.

The addition of fullback Cory Schlesinger, an ace blocker, could help Brown excel. Cameron hopes Brown and Schlesinger can work together like the pair he coached in San Diego, LaDainian Tomlinson and Lorenzo Neal. Schlesinger, who is entering his 13th season, needs to stay healthy; currently his top backup is rookie sixth-rounder Reagan Mauia, who is a project.

With Ricky Williams' future with the team in limbo, third-round pick Lorenzo Booker likely will be the top backup to Brown. Booker (5-10, 191) is on the small side but has the elite speed to be a playmaker. A promising third-down threat, Booker could complement Brown well. **GRADE: B**

**Receivers**—With the Dolphins running a more open, pass-happy attack, Chris Chambers could get more of the deep-ball opportunities he lacked last season. Without enough looks, he

## SCOUT TAKES

### A scout from another team sizes up the Dolphins

**Jason Taylor** is pretty much a complete player. Not only is he going to beat you on a pass rush, he's going to get a pass deflection. Not only is he going to get a sack, he's going to cause a fumble. He's going to chase you down from the back side. ... Offensively, I'm not sure what **Cam Cameron** brings will be visible this year because of their deficiencies at quarterback and in the line. He's got to upgrade that offense. ... Personally, I haven't been impressed by **Joey Porter**. I didn't see him last year being a pass-rush threat where teams had to scheme to block him. He's not a run stopper. He's going to hustle, but I think plays have to be created for him. ... **Lorenzo Booker**, their third-round pick, is a good change-of-pace, third-down back who should complement **Ronnie Brown**. He's got good hands and will give them quickness and explosiveness.



BOB LEVERONE / SN

JAY DROWNS / SN



lost confidence and focus, which led to drops.

This should change with Cameron, who knows how to get the ball into his top receiver's hands. He'll work Chambers out of the slot if the deep routes aren't working.

Chambers likely will benefit from the addition of speedy first-round pick Ted Ginn, whose presence could force defenses to lighten their coverage on Chambers. It might take Ginn, who is coming off a foot injury, a little time to develop, which means Marty Booker likely will hold the No. 2 job.

Booker is a smart veteran who was more sure-handed last season and proved he could be a threat on more than short routes. Backup Derek Hagan (6-0, 203) has the speed and size to be a downfield threat but needs to reduce his drops.

Although free-agent pickup David Martin has never been an elite pass-catching tight end, his size and skills could allow him to reach his potential in Cameron's system. However, he needs to develop into a more willing blocker. Backup Justin Peelle could be utilized as a blocking tight end. **GRADE: C**

**Line**—Within the first few days of the free-agent signing period, Cameron had almost completely dismantled the line, which created voids at both guard spots and raised plenty of questions at left tackle.

It will be crucial for the line to improve in pass protection, which makes Vernon Carey's transition from right tackle to left tackle a top story line to watch. Carey is the team's best lineman, but the move comes with risk, because Carey finally was beginning to reach his potential at right tackle and could lose confidence if he doesn't adjust well.

L.J. Shelton will switch to right tackle; he was slated to play left tackle last season before injuries forced the team to move him to right guard. If Shelton gets his speed and footwork in order, his adjustment back to tackle will be smooth.

If Carey struggles at left tackle, the team will move him back to the right side. Shelton then would be in the mix to start at left tackle, as would Anthony Alabi, a quick, athletic lineman.

Rex Hadnot, the line's vocal leader, made a smooth transition from guard to center last year. He has good punch as a blocker but needs to show better quickness.

The team turned to the draft for help, adding versatile

## FANTASY SOURCE PICKS

### STUD

RB Ronnie Brown

### SLEEPER

WR Derek Hagan

### STUMBLER

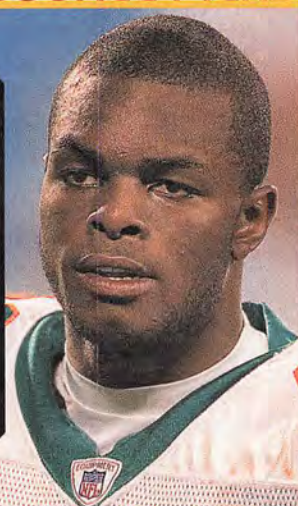
QB Daunte Culpepper

### COMEBACK CANDIDATE

WR Chris Chambers

### STILL TOO RAW

WR Ted Ginn Jr.

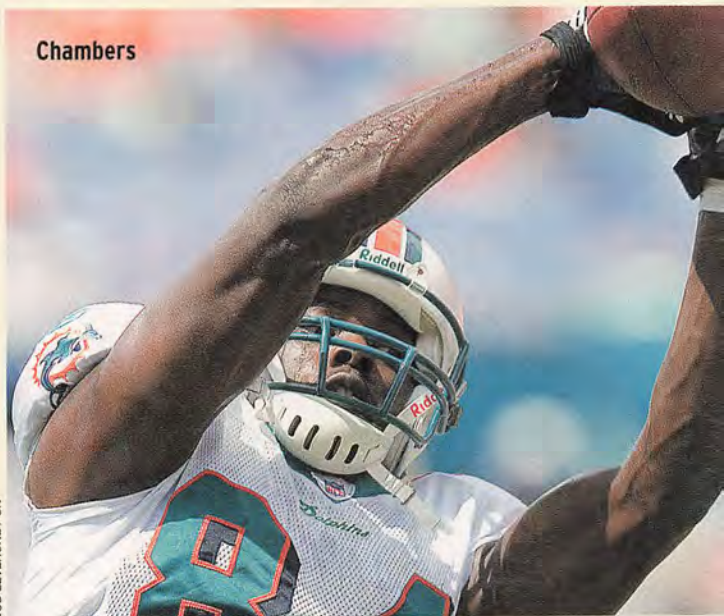


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## SCOUTING REPORTS: OFFENSE

### Chambers



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### ↓ Daunte Culpepper, QB

**Strengths:** A physically imposing player with a rocket for a right arm. Throws a beautiful deep ball. Can put the ball into tight spots and throw with force on the move. Has the strength to escape in the pocket and will run over defenders to get the first down. **Weaknesses:** Struggles with touch to all areas of the field, especially short. Lacks accuracy outside the pocket. Makes poor decisions. Will hold the ball too long and take unnecessary hits. Has durability issues.

**Bottom line:** Culpepper continues to recover from his knee injury and may not be ready to play this season. If the Dolphins land a veteran such as Trent Green, Culpepper's career with Miami could be over. **Grade: 7.9**

### Cleo Lemon, QB

**Strengths:** Has a big-time arm and can make any throw. Throws a tight spiral and can put the ball in the window. Has good foot quickness and can pick up positive yards on his own. **Weaknesses:** Will lock on to his primary target and not work through his progression. Lacks touch, especially on deep throws.

**Bottom line:** Lemon lacks experience but flashed potential in 2006. If the Dolphins don't acquire a veteran, he could be the opening day starter. **Grade: 5.9**

### ↑ Ronnie Brown, RB

**Strengths:** Has excellent speed to get

to the outside and the power to run between the tackles. Can score from anywhere on the field. Can break arm tackles and works to finish his runs. Has soft hands out of the backfield.

**Weaknesses:** More fast than quick. Has to continue to work on his blocking; will duck his head and miss.

**Bottom line:** Brown will be the engine that makes coach Cam Cameron's offense go. If the team finds a quarterback to shoulder some of Brown's load, this could be his breakout season. **Grade: 8.5**

### ↓ Cory Schlesinger, FB

**Strengths:** Has good bulk and blocking awareness. Takes great angles. Has good short-area power and seldom loses after locking on. Has reliable hands and runs good routes.

**Weaknesses:** Age and injuries are catching up fast. Lacks speed and elusiveness. Has trouble hitting moving targets at the second level.

**Bottom line:** Schlesinger is a fringe starter in decline, but his blocking skills still will be of great value to the Dolphins. **Grade: 5.9**

### Chris Chambers, WR

**Strengths:** Has good bulk and great speed. Plays his best against man coverage, where he can run past defenders. Wins nearly every footrace if he hits a crease on the run. A solid blocker.

**Weaknesses:** Gets frustrated if he doesn't get enough attention early in

Players are graded by War Room scouts on a 1-10 scale.  
\*Rookies (not graded)

games. Needs to be more consistent catching the ball. Doesn't run crisp routes, and can be forced off his path.  
**Bottom line:** Knee problems and shaky quarterback play may have been factors, but Chambers didn't play well in 2006. He needs to become more than just a vertical sideline threat.  
**Grade: 7.7**

#### ↑ Marty Booker, WR

**Strengths:** Has good quickness and consistently gets a clean release off the line. Has good hands when focused. Can be an outstanding blocker.  
**Weaknesses:** Lacks elusiveness and explosive speed after the catch. Doesn't play with urgency.  
**Bottom line:** Booker will fit nicely in Miami's new offense, because he's effective on short-to-intermediate routes and after the catch. **Grade: 6.9**

#### David Martin, TE

**Strengths:** Shows good quickness and agility. Gets a clean release off the line. Has soft hands, and catch outside his frame. Has red zone potential.  
**Weaknesses:** Won't push the pile as a blocker and can be overwhelmed by physical defensive ends. Takes poor angles. Must work on his recognition skills against zone coverage.  
**Bottom line:** Martin has trouble staying healthy, and he won't be nearly the receiving threat his predecessor, Randy McMichael, was. **Grade: 5.7**

#### ↑ Vernon Carey, T

**Strengths:** Has good lateral quickness. Uses his hands well in pass protection to gain inside position. Blocks well on the move and at the second level. Rolls his hips well on run blocks.  
**Weaknesses:** Lacks overall strength and will get bull rushed when he doesn't get leverage. Has trouble sustaining run blocks. Struggles against stunts.  
**Bottom line:** Carey is a player on the rise. But after finding a comfort level at right tackle, he might switch back to left tackle—the position where he began his NFL career—in 2007.  
**Grade: 7.1**

#### ↓ L.J. Shelton, T

**Strengths:** A strong, wide-bodied mauler. Has an excellent initial punch and uses his hands well. Anchors effectively against bull rushers. A

much better run blocker than pass protector.

**Weaknesses:** Has a history of lackluster play and injuries. Lacks perimeter quickness and range. A nonfactor at the second level.

**Bottom line:** Shelton must improve his conditioning and quickness to be a solid example on a young line. He will have to fight for his starting job in camp. **Grade: 6.9**

#### Joe Toledo, G

**Strengths:** Has good mobility and a quick first step. Plays with leverage and balance. Gets to the second level to hit moving targets as a run blocker. Sets well in pass protection.  
**Weaknesses:** Needs to improve his technique. Must better use his hands and feet to improve his explosiveness. Needs to gain lower-body strength. Has trouble picking up blitzes. Has durability concerns.  
**Bottom line:** Toledo made solid strides as a rookie and will compete for a starting job this season. He's a versatile player with a lot of potential but must stay healthy. **Grade: 5.5**

#### Chris Liwienski, G

**Strengths:** Shows good initial pop and excellent strength at the point of attack. Drives his legs and works to finish blocks. Shows good awareness in pass protection and anchors against bull rushers.  
**Weaknesses:** A limited athlete. Struggles to hit moving targets and does not pull or trap well. Has a slow pass set and gets beaten inside by initial quickness.  
**Bottom line:** Liwienski is savvy and versatile, but his best days are behind him. Still he will battle for the Dolphins' left guard job. **Grade: 5.4**

#### Rex Hadnot, C

**Strengths:** Has plus strength and good hands; can sustain blocks once locked on. Plays with leverage and drives his legs. Takes good angles.  
**Weaknesses:** Lacks physical tools and power. Has trouble with quick, penetrating one-gap defensive tackles.  
**Bottom line:** Strength and toughness are Hadnot's calling cards. He has the versatility to play guard or center. **Grade: 5.9**

**KEY:** ↑ Ascending ↓ Descending

## INSIDERS POLL

After two strong games to finish 2006, Ronnie Brown will:

Establish himself as an elite back by rushing for 1,500 yards

Be solid but give no indication he will develop into an elite back

Have more injury troubles and fail to reach 1,000 yards behind a rebuilt line



Based on a poll of SN's 32 team correspondents

## BOLD PREDICTIONS

- 1 Even though opponents will try to focus on DE/OLB Jason Taylor, the presence of OLB Joey Porter will help free Taylor to continue his dominance. Don't be surprised if he wins his second consecutive defensive player of the year award.
- 2 Depth concerns in the secondary will be a considerable issue, particularly because CBs Travis Daniels (ankle) and Andre' Goodman (shoulder) can't seem to shake injuries.
- 3 WR Chris Chambers will be better utilized and return to elite form, eclipsing 1,000 yards receiving as he did in 2005.

linemen Samson Satele and Drew Mormino. Satele could thrive as an interior run blocker. Although he might be a more natural fit at center, he's expected to challenge second-year pro Joe Toledo, who has been hampered by injuries, at right guard. Mormino isn't overly athletic, but he has enough lower-body power to anchor and will be a flexible backup.

Free-agent pickup Chris Liwienski could be the starter at left guard. He fares best in tight spaces, where he can be effective as a drive blocker. **GRADE: D**

### DEFENSE

Coordinator Dom Capers returns after constructing one of the league's best defenses last year. The Dolphins have the versatility to throw 4-3 and 3-4 looks at opponents, and with the addition of outside linebacker Joey Porter, they likely will use the 3-4 more often. Regardless of the scheme, Capers loves to blitz and will send players from any angle. There's no reason to think this group won't continue to dominate—even if it is one

of the league's oldest and has questions in the secondary.

**Line**—The Dolphins are adept at pressuring the quarterback and stopping the run, and a lot of their success starts with the line.

Jason Taylor is the key to the defense, and the Dolphins will continue to use him as a dangerous hybrid end/outside linebacker. His ability to anticipate the moves of both quarterbacks and running backs allows him to make smart decisions in pursuit.

The unit's success could hinge on the health of nose tackle Keith Traylor, who turns 38 this season. His knee problems require him to get frequent rest, but Traylor still effectively clogs the middle in the 3-4. The team doesn't have a backup of Traylor's caliber, but with proper grooming, fourth-round pick Paul Soliai could become a factor inside. Second-year player Fred Evans also could step into that role. Evans has made impressive strides and is athletic enough to keep opponents on their heels.

Tackle Vonnie Holliday is coming off one of his best years. He is athletic and intelligent and should be an effective all-around player for a few more years. He can move to end in 3-4 looks. With the departures of Kevin Carter and David Bowens, the team is counting on Matt Roth to be the starting end opposite Taylor. Roth, who has bulked up the past couple of years, needs to make up for his shorter arms with his speed around the edge. The team picked up Akbar Gbaja-Biamila to provide depth.

Seventh-round pick Abraham Wright has the versatility to play end or outside linebacker. He needs to get bigger to avoid getting blown off the line. **GRADE: A**

**Linebackers**—With Porter and Taylor bringing heat from the outside and Zach Thomas and Channing Crowder stuffing the run inside in the 3-4, the Dolphins could have one of the most threatening front sevens in the league.

Porter is expected to provide the aggressive mentality the Dolphins have sought to bring off the edge opposite Taylor. His sack production dipped a little last season (from 10½ in 2005 to 7 in '06), so he needs to show he isn't losing a step in his ninth season.

Thomas remains the leader on defense. His smarts, combined with his dedication to staying in shape, allow him to maintain a Pro Bowl level, despite his advancing age.

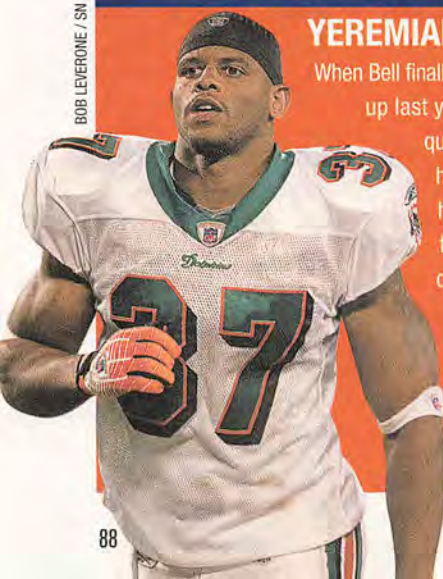
If Thomas goes down, Crowder likely will man the middle in the 4-3, with Donnie Spragan taking his spot on the weak side. Crowder played in the middle in college and probably will move there permanently when Thomas eventually retires.

## SECRET WEAPON

### YEREMIAH BELL, S

When Bell finally joined the starting lineup last year in Week 6, the only question was: Why didn't it happen sooner? He might have the best sense for the ball of any Dolphins defensive back. Plus, he's an aggressive hitter who plays far bigger than his size. He could have a big impact for an otherwise mediocre unit.

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## SCOUTING REPORTS: DEFENSE

### Jason Taylor, E

**Strengths:** Has exceptional acceleration and anticipation off the edge. Gets offensive tackles off-balance and does a great job of using outside-inside double moves. Will use rip and swim moves to get off blocks. A great open-field tackler. Plays with great effort, even when hurt.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal bulk and strength and will get engulfed by bigger tackles. Lacks the strength to anchor when teams run at him. Takes himself out of plays by running around blocks.

**Bottom line:** Taylor, one of the most explosive defensive ends in the game, might also shift to outside linebacker when the Dolphins go with 3-4 looks. He's not getting younger but likely will maintain his high level of play for another year or two. **Grade: 8.8**

### Matt Roth, E

**Strengths:** Has a strong upper body. Uses his hands to shed blocks and is relentless at the point of attack. Has a quick first step and takes good angles to make the tackle.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks top-end speed. Can be engulfed by bigger linemen, and lacks the upper-body strength to shed blocks.

**Bottom line:** Roth is a tough competitor who makes plays more on hustle than athletic ability. After waiting his turn, he will get a chance to start in 2007. **Grade: 6.0**

### Keith Traylor, T

**Strengths:** Has massive bulk and is a load to move. Shows good strength at the point of attack. Seldom is blocked one-on-one in the running game. Versatile, with experience at both tackle spots in one- and two-gap schemes.

**Weaknesses:** Aging; must be rested to be successful. Lacks range. Does not provide a threat as a pass rusher.

**Bottom line:** Traylor still has the strength and size to handle 20-25 plays per game as a two-gap run staffer. **Grade: 6.0**

### Vonnice Holliday, T

**Strengths:** Has good size and very good strength. Can stack and shed at the point of attack. Does a good job of standing up offensive tackles.

**Weaknesses:** Has major durability problems. Gets frustrated and will give up on plays. Stiff and lacks good

short-area quickness.

**Bottom line:** Holliday's physical tools are declining, and his durability is a huge issue. He has the ability to hold his own but is better suited as a backup. **Grade: 5.9**

### Joey Porter, LB

**Strengths:** Has an excellent motor, and can intimidate opponents. Fills aggressively and shows outstanding range in the running game. Has good pass-rush ability; anticipates the snap and puts pressure on the offensive tackle. Has excellent closing speed to finish plays and great feel in underneath zone coverages.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks discipline at times; gets out of position by running around blocks and disregarding cut-back runs in pursuit.

**Bottom line:** Porter gets plenty of publicity for his antics off the field, but he has the game to back up his mouth and is underappreciated in coverage. **Grade: 8.7**

### Zach Thomas, LB

**Strengths:** Has rare instincts and recognition skills. Reads the ball quickly and gets a great jump on plays. Has a nonstop motor and an excellent closing burst. An explosive tackler who will force fumbles. Displays good change-of-direction skills.

**Weaknesses:** Undersized and has durability issues. Has trouble getting through traffic. Has taken a beating and wears down late each season.

**Bottom line:** Thomas is aging, but he still can play with the best in the NFL. **Grade: 8.5**

### Channing Crowder, LB

**Strengths:** Has good athleticism and potential. Goes sideline to sideline against the run and has the range to excel in coverage. Good at covering tight ends man to man. Has outstanding speed, agility and pursuit skills.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks good read-and-react ability. Will take false steps and get by on his athletic ability. Needs to improve his overall strength.

**Bottom line:** Crowder has all the physical tools to be as good as Junior Seau, whom he replaced as the mental part of his game. **Grade: 7.5**

### Will Allen, CB

**Strengths:** Has excellent top-end



Thomas

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speed, change-of-direction skills and burst. Very smooth with good hip turn. Shows good awareness in zone coverage and has quality ball skills.

**Weaknesses:** Has inconsistent recognition skills. Must improve in man-to-man coverage and do a better job of jamming receivers at the line. Avoids collisions and misses tackles. Has trouble staying healthy.

**Bottom line:** Allen is a solid player who seems to have lost his focus and desire. Perhaps he will be motivated by the arrival of a new coaching staff.

**Grade: 7.2**

### Andre' Goodman, CB

**Strengths:** Has fluid hips and exceptional speed. Explodes out of his pedal, and can turn and run with the fastest receivers. Has a great burst to the ball. Shows good awareness in zone coverage. Willing and technically sound against the run.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks bulk, strength and durability. Has trouble with big receivers; gets shielded from the ball. Doesn't consistently diagnose plays well. Not a good tackler.

**Bottom line:** Goodman has an aversion to tackling, but he played well as a starter in 2006. If he overcomes a

shoulder problem, he likely will hold that position because of his solid ability in all coverage schemes. **Grade: 5.9**

### ↑Jeremiah Bell, S

**Strengths:** Has big-play ability. Has good range and speed. A solid tackler who will look to knock the receiver out coming across the middle.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks strength and doesn't play with a mean streak. Not a very smart player.

**Bottom line:** Bell is a strong athlete, and if he's left to roam the deep middle, he has the ability to make plays on the ball. **Grade: 6.7**

### Renaldo Hill, S

**Strengths:** Has excellent quickness, fluid hips and good feet. Plays with sound technique. Seldom gets caught out of position and does a nice job of planting and breaking on routes.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal size. Not a physical presence and doesn't have the speed to recover when beat.

**Bottom line:** Hill is expected to start for the Dolphins but is better suited for a nickel back role, where he could use quickness and athletic ability to cover receivers in the slot. **Grade: 6.1**

## KEY MOVES

### 2007 DRAFT PICKS

Rd.-Pick

GRADE C-

#### 1-9 Ted Ginn, WR/KR, Ohio State

Possibly the draft's fastest player and a threat as a return man.

#### 2-40 John Beck, QB, BYU

Has smarts and accuracy but might lack the elite arm strength to be a star.

#### 2-60 Samson Satele, G, Hawaii

Couples an impressive work ethic with an aggressive style.

#### 3-71 Lorenzo Booker, RB, Florida State

Has the elite speed and dancing skills to make defenders miss.

#### 4-108 Paul Soliai, DT, Utah

Big tackle (6-4, 344) who could replace Keith Traylor when he retires.

#### 6-181 Reagan Mauia, FB, Hawaii

Has serious size (6-0, 348) and unexpected speed.

#### 6-199 Drew Mormino, G/C, Central Michigan

Not aggressive but could become a decent player.

#### 7-219 Kelvin Smith, LB, Syracuse

Added to bolster the special teams unit.

#### 7-225 Brandon Fields, P, Michigan State

Has a strong leg but must improve his technique to stick.

#### 7-238 Abraham Wright, DE, Colorado

Has the potential to be a decent sack artist as a backup.

## VETERAN PLAYERS

**Additions:** DE Akbar Gbaja-Biamila (FA/Chargers); K Jay Feely (FA/Giants), TE David Martin (FA/Packers), LB Joey Porter (FA/Steelers), OT Mike Rosenthal (FA/Vikings), FB Cory Schlesinger (FA/Lions), S Cameron Worrell (FA/Bears).

**Losses:** OL Bennie Anderson (FA), FB Darian Barnes (FA/Jets), DE David Bowens (FA/Jets), DE Kevin Carter (FA/Buccaneers), QB Joey Harrington (FA/Falcons), G Geno James (FA), P Donnie Jones (FA/Rams), WR Eric Kimble (FA), K Olindo Mare (trade/Saints), OT Damion McIntosh (FA/Chiefs), OL Seth McKinney (FA/Browns), TE Randy McMichael (FA/Rams), RB Travis Minor (FA/Rams), RB Sammy Morris (FA/Patriots), WR Wes Welker (trade/Patriots).

Crowder needs to improve his coverage skills. Spragan, who has been replaced by Porter as the starter, has a firm understanding of the system. **GRADE: A**

**Secondary**—The ability to limit big plays—which this unit struggled to do last season—will be the key to the defense's overall performance. The secondary developed some cohesiveness late in the season and needs to build on that.

Safeties Renaldo Hill and Jeremiah Bell will keep the secondary in order. Hill makes good decisions but is hindered by his lack of open-field speed. He is most effective covering the middle. Bell is solid against the run, but his strength is coverage and he lays some nasty hits on receivers over the middle.

Jason Allen, the No. 16 overall pick in 2006, hasn't shown the mental skills required to be an NFL safety and might move to cornerback. The move could help his development because he'll be more free to rely on his athleticism. With Allen's possible move to corner, safety depth is extremely thin. The top option is Travares Tillman, whom Bell replaced as the starter last season.

Will Allen is a solid coverage corner. He has the athletic ability to handle run support but lacks focus in that area. Andre' Goodman and Travis Daniels will battle for the other starting job. Both are smart players, but they lack elite athleticism and need to stay healthy. Goodman suffered a setback in May, when he reinjured his shoulder and underwent surgery. He may still have the edge on the job, but the injury could further open the door for Daniels, who had offseason ankle surgery but could



boost the secondary if he regains the impressive form he showed as a rookie in 2005. **GRADE: C**

## SPECIAL TEAMS

With new scoring threats added to the kicking and return games, the special teams might be the most improved unit on the team.

The Dolphins obviously want Ginn to excel as a receiver, but emphasis is being placed on his ability to make special teams a high-impact unit. He was one of the fastest players in this year's draft and has proved he can shine on returns.

## STADIUM/MEDIA

Dolphin Stadium (75,192, grass)

Tickets: 1-888-FINS-TIX

Training camp: Miami Dolphins

Training Facility, Davie, Fla.;  
954-452-7000

Radio: The Ticket (790 AM)

Website: miamidolphins.com

The team signed kicker Jay Feely to replace Olindo Mare, who was traded to the Saints. Feely is coming off an impressive year with the Giants but doesn't have as strong a leg as Mare's. That could have an effect on kick-off coverage, which otherwise should be solid.

Donnie Jones is gone, but rookie Brandon Fields has the leg strength to take over the punting duties. He will need to get off his punts more quickly in the NFL, which can be a tough adjustment. **GRADE: B**

## BOTTOM LINE

At this point last year, the Dolphins were bubbling with optimism, but that giddy hope gave way to the same old frustrations as the team took a step back. Another year without a playoff appearance has led some to wonder when—if ever—things will turn around. The good news? A team that has lacked explosiveness on offense has found an offensive coach to lead it. But it's going to take more than one year for the Dolphins to inch toward the success they have craved. Simply put, fans will believe it when they see it.

SN

Jeff Darlington covers the Dolphins for the Miami Herald.

## PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

### OFFENSE

**QB** ■ Daunte Culpepper

● Cleo Lemon

**FB** ▲ Cory Schlesinger

□ Reagan Maule

**RB** ■ Ronnie Brown

● Lorenzo Booker

**WR** ■ Chris Chambers

□ Derek Hagan

**WR** ■ Marty Booker

● Ted Ginn

**TE** ■ David Martin

□ Justin Peelle

**LT** ■ Vernon Carey

● Anthony Alabi

**LG** ■ Chris Liwinski

□ Drew Mormino

**C** ■ Rex Hadnot

● Samson Satele

**RG** ■ Joe Toledo

● Samson Satele

**RT** ■ L.J. Shelton

■ Vernon Carey

### DEFENSE

**LE** ● Matt Roth

□ Abraham Wright

**DT** ■ Vonnie Holliday

● Fred Evans

**NT** ▲ Keith Traylor

□ Paul Soliai

**RE** ▲ Jason Taylor

□ A. Gbaja-Biamila

**SLB** ▲ Joey Porter

● Donnie Spragan

**MLB** ▲ Zach Thomas

■ Channing Crowder

**WLB** ■ Channing Crowder

● Derrick Pope

**LCB** ● Andre' Goodman

● Travis Daniels

**SS** ■ Jeremiah Bell

● Travares Tillman

**FS** ● Renaldo Hill

□ Jason Allen

**RCB** ■ Will Allen

□ Michael Lehan

### SPECIALISTS

**K** ■ Jay Feely

**KR** ■ Ted Ginn

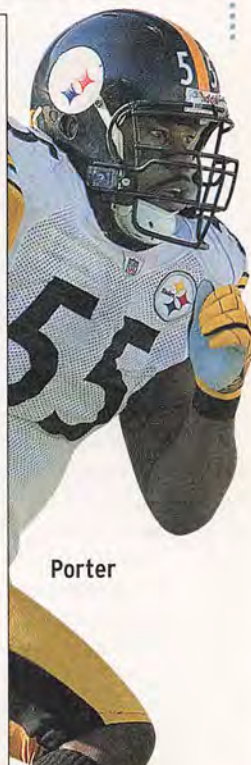
**P** ■ Brandon Fields

**PR** ■ Ted Ginn

**LS** ● John Denney

● Adequate □ Fringe

Depth charts updated weekly at [sportingnews.com](http://sportingnews.com)



Porter

## DOLPHINS ROSTER

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL exp.	College	How acq.	2006 GP/GS
QUARTERBACKS							
9	John Beck	6-2/215	8/21/81	R	BYU	D2a/07	—
8	Daunte Culpepper	6-4/264	1/28/77	9	Central Florida	T-Min/06	4/4
7	Gibran Hamdan	6-4/220	2/8/81	4	Indiana	FA/07	0/0
17	Cleo Lemon	6-2/215	8/16/79	4	Arkansas State	T-SD/05	4/1
RUNNING BACKS							
20	Lorenzo Booker	5-10/191	6/14/84	R	Florida State	D3/07	—
23	Ronnie Brown	6-0/233	12/12/81	3	Auburn	D1/05	13/12
38	Patrick Cobbs	5-8/210	1/31/83	2	North Texas	FA/06	3/0
22	Jesse Chatman	5-8/225	9/22/79	6	East. Washington	FA/07	0/0
40	Kyle Eckel (FB)	5-11/245	12/30/81	2	Navy	W-NE/05	0/0
45	Reagan Maule (FB)	6-0/270	7/6/84	R	Hawaii	D6a/07	—
33	Ray Perkins	5-10/205	11/6/82	1	S.E. Louisiana	FA/07	0/0
30	Cory Schlesinger (FB)	6-0/247	6/23/72	13	Nebraska	FA/07	14/5
RECEIVERS							
86	Marty Booker	6-0/212	7/31/76	9	Louisiana-Monroe	T-Chi/04	14/13
80	Kelly Campbell	5-9/175	7/23/80	4	Georgia Tech	FA/07	0/0
84	Chris Chambers	5-11/210	8/12/78	7	Wisconsin	D2/01	16/16
11	Ted Ginn	6-0/180	4/12/85	R	Ohio State	D1/07	—
82	Derek Hagan	6-2/203	9/21/84	2	Arizona State	D3/06	16/0
81	Az-Zahir Hakim	5-10/189	6/3/77	10	San Diego State	FA/07	6/0
49	Aaron Halterman (TE)	6-5/255	3/31/82	2	Indiana	FA/07	0/0
88	David Martin (TE)	6-4/262	3/13/79	8	Tennessee	FA/07	11/4
89	Tim Massaquoi (TE)	6-3/255	7/8/82	2	Michigan	FA/06	7/0
87	Justin Peelle (TE)	6-4/255	3/15/79	6	Oregon	FA/06	15/0
85	Jason Rader (TE)	6-4/274	4/12/81	3	Marshall	FA/07	3/1
15	P.K. Sam	6-3/210	2/26/83	3	Florida State	FA/07	0/0
OFFENSIVE LINEMEN							
79	Anthony Alabi (T)	6-5/313	2/16/81	3	TCU	D5/05	6/0
72	Vernon Carey (T)	6-5/335	7/31/81	4	Miami	D1/04	16/16
66	Rex Hadnot (C)	6-2/323	1/28/82	4	Houston	D6/04	16/16
68	Johnathan Ingram (C)	6-2/300	9/20/80	3	San Diego State	FA/07	0/0
76	Chris Liwinski (G)	6-5/321	8/2/75	10	Indiana	FA/07	16/6
77	Drew Mormino (G/C)	6-3/299	11/20/83	R	Central Michigan	D6b/07	—
78	Mike Rosenthal (T)	6-7/318	6/10/77	8	Notre Dame	FA/07	15/3
64	Samson Satele (G/C)	6-2/300	11/29/84	R	Hawaii	D2b/07	—
70	L.J. Shelton (T)	6-6/345	3/21/76	9	Eastern Michigan	FA/06	16/16
73	Dan Stevenson (G)	6-5/300	10/4/82	1	Notre Dame	FA/06	0/0
67	Joe Toledo (T)	6-5/335	10/20/82	2	Washington	D4/06	0/0
DEFENSIVE LINEMEN							
97	John Denney (E/LS)	6-5/270	12/13/78	3	BYU	FA/05	16/0
62	Fred Evans (T)	6-4/305	11/6/83	2	Texas State	D7a/06	1/0
60	Steve Filita (T)	6-0/327	5/16/82	2	Utah	FA/07	0/0
	Akbar Gbaja-Biamila (E/LB)	6-5/260	5/6/79	4	San Diego State	FA/07	3/0
91	Vonnie Holliday (T)	6-5/290	12/11/75	10	North Carolina	FA/05	16/16
76	Chase Page (T)	6-4/295	5/20/83	1	North Carolina	FA/06	0/0
98	Matt Roth (E)	6-4/272	10/14/82	3	Iowa	D2/05	16/0
96	Paul Soliai (T)	6-4/344	12/30/83	R	Utah	D4/07	—
99	Jason Taylor (E/LB)	6-6/255	9/1/74	11	Akron	D3a/97	16/16
94	Keith Traylor (T)	6-2/340	9/3/69	7	Central Oklahoma	FA/05	14/14
92	Kevin Vickerson (T)	6-5/305	1/8/83	3	Michigan State	D7/05	0/0
95	Dan Wilkinson (T)	6-4/340	3/13/73	14	Ohio State	FA/06	10/0
53	Abraham Wright	6-3/245	10/15/84	R	Colorado	D7c/07	—
65	Rodrique Wright (T)	6-5/300	7/31/84	2	Texas	D7b/06	0/0
LINEBACKERS							
52	Channing Crowder	6-2/242	12/2/83	3	Florida	D3/05	16/14
53	Jim Maxwell	6-4/240	8/8/81	4	Gardner-Webb	FA/06	8/0
51	Robert McCune	6-0/240	3/9/79	3	Louisville	FA/06	0/0
56	Derrick Pope	6-0/233	5/4/82	4	Alabama	D7/04	11/0
55	Joey Porter	6-3/250	3/22/77	9	Colorado State	FA/07	14/14
58	Kelvin Smith	6-2/233	3/20/84	R	Syracuse	D7a/07	—
59	Donnie Spragan	6-3/239	7/12/76	7	Stanford	FA/05	16/9
54	Zach Thomas	5-11/230	9/1/73	12	Texas Tech	D5c/96	16/16
DEFENSIVE BACKS							
32	Jason Allen (S/CB)	6-1/213	7/5/83	2	Tennessee	D1/06	16/0
25	Will Allen (CB)	5-10/196	8/5/78	7	Syracuse	FA/06	15/15
37	Jeremiah Bell (S)	6-0/200	3/3/78	4	Eastern Kentucky	D6c/03	16/11
21	Travis Daniels (CB)	6-1/192	9/8/82	3	LSU	D4/05	12/6
29	Andre' Goodman (CB)	5-10/185	8/11/78	6	South Carolina	FA/06	15/14
24	Renaldo Hill (S/CB)	5-11/189	11/12/78	7	Michigan State	FA/06	16/16
20	Eddie Jackson (CB)	6-0/200	12/19/80	4	Arkansas	W-Car/05	14/2
22	Michael Lehan (CB)	6-0/190	11/25/79	5	Minnesota	FA/06	15/2
27	Shirtonya Mitchell (CB)	5-11/183	5/16/82	2	Missouri	FA/06	1/0
26	Travares Tillman (S)	6-1/190	10/8/77	7	Georgia Tech	FA/05	14/7
44	Cameron Worrell (S)	5-11/194	12/14/79	5	Fresno State	FA/07	16/0
SPECIALISTS							
3	Jay Feely (K)	5-10/206	5/23/76	7	Michigan	FA/07	16/0
4	Brandon Fields (P)	6-6/235	5/21/84	R	Michigan State	D7b/07	—

Abbreviations: D1-draft pick, first round; W-claimed on waivers; T-obtained in trade; FA-free-agent acquisition.

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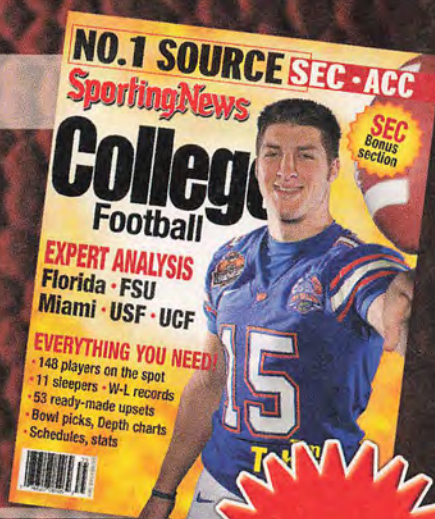
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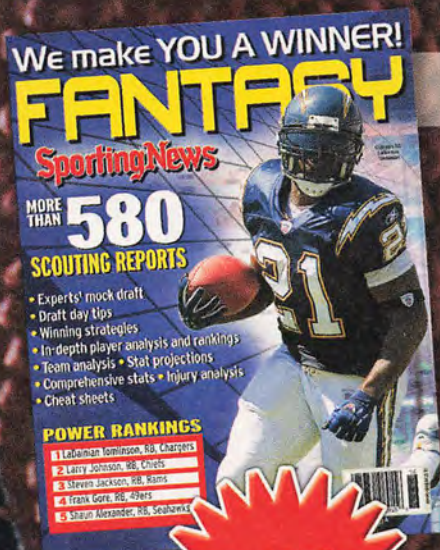
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# PATRIOTS

**Brady's bunch is armed, dangerous and excited about starring in a Super Bowl rerun**

**SN PICK** 1st, AFC East (14-2)

By JOHN TOMASE

**N**ow the Colts have done it. They've made the Patriots very, very angry. The Pats fell one minute shy of the Super Bowl when they lost to Indy in the AFC championship game and then devoted the offseason to ensuring it doesn't happen again. Usually wallflowers in the free-agent market, they commandeered the dance floor and signed prized line-backer Adalius Thomas and deep threat Donte' Stallworth. Then, they traded for up-and-coming slot receiver Wes Welker and the coup de grace, Randy Moss.

These newcomers supplement a core of standouts that includes quarterback Tom Brady, the entire defensive line and line-backers Mike Vrabel and Tedy Bruschi. Add in coach Bill Belichick and the Pats have all the pieces in place for another title run.

After blowing an 18-point lead in the conference championship game, the Pats are more determined than ever to win another crown. They've won three of the past six Super Bowls, but there comes a point when that sentence construction no longer carries much impact—though “four of seven” has a nice ring to it.

## OFFENSE

Coordinator Josh McDaniels is one of the game's rising stars—and perhaps a future head coach. In general, the Patriots have preferred to throw under Belichick, for one obvious reason—Brady. Since the days of Charlie Weis, the Patriots have felt comfortable emptying the backfield, spreading the field and letting their quarterback do the rest. For all the attention paid to two-tight end sets early last season, the Patriots actually used more three-wideout groupings down the stretch and in the playoffs, with tight end Ben Watson and running back Kevin Faulk giving Brady de facto five-receiver sets.

**Quarterbacks**—Brady, simply put, is a winner. Everything revolves around his ability to spread the field, find the open man and hit him in stride. It works because Brady is adept at setting the protection at the line, identifying pressure and getting rid of the ball quickly. How many quarterbacks *like* to get blitzed? Brady does because it gives him a chance to exploit single coverage.

## SCHEDULE

All times Eastern

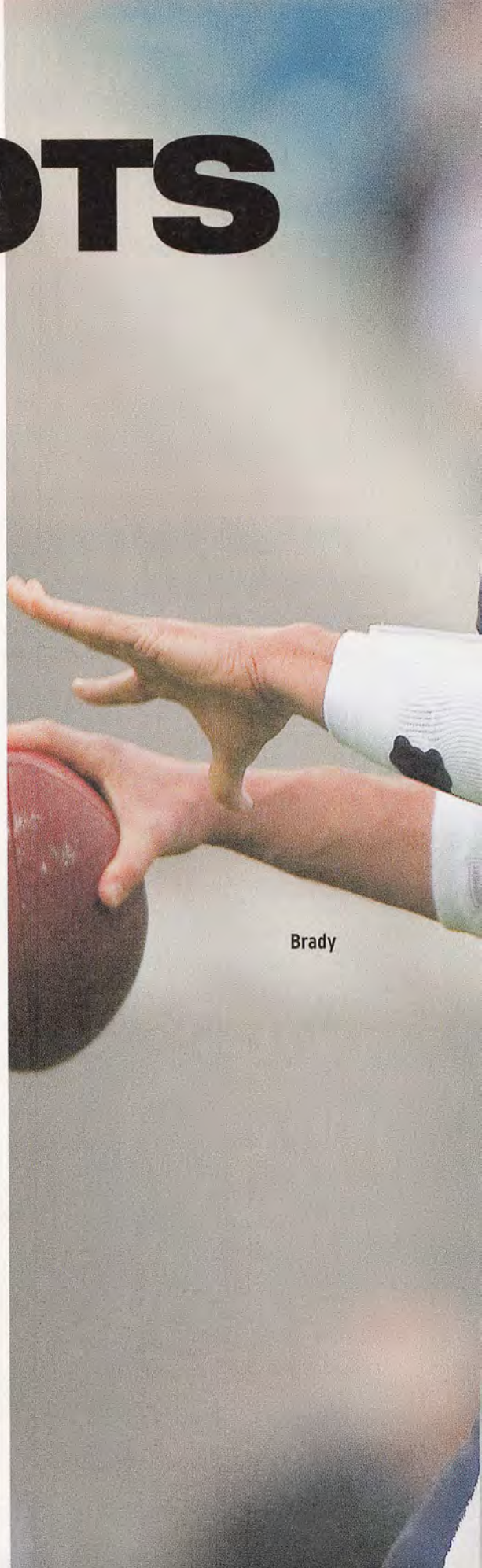
Sept. 9	at N.Y. Jets	1:00
Sept. 16	SAN DIEGO	8:15
Sept. 23	BUFFALO	1:00
Oct. 1	at Cincinnati*	8:30
Oct. 7	CLEVELAND	1:00
Oct. 14	at Dallas	4:15
Oct. 21	at Miami	1:00
Oct. 28	WASHINGTON	4:15
Nov. 4	at Indianapolis	4:15
Nov. 11	Open date	
Nov. 18	at Buffalo	1:00
Nov. 25	PHILADELPHIA	8:15
Dec. 3	at Baltimore*	8:30
Dec. 9	PITTSBURGH	1:00
Dec. 16	N.Y. JETS	1:00
Dec. 23	MIAMI	1:00
Dec. 29	at N.Y. Giants††	8:15

Strength of schedule: 3rd

\*Monday †Saturday

Analysis of every Patriots game:  
[sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom](http://sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom)

## REGULAR-SEASON WINS



Brady



Brady also is a Dan Marino-like master of escaping pressure with minimal movement in the pocket. Few quarterbacks can match his ability to complete his full throwing motion in the face of onrushing linemen.

Backup Matt Cassel has flashed poise and accuracy his first two years, but his lack of experience is a significant concern. He has 32 attempts in the NFL after throwing 33 passes at USC, where he had the misfortune of sitting behind Carson Palmer and then Matt Leinart. Cassel has a little bit of Brady in him—especially in the way he carries himself—but the Patriots hope he only sees the field in kneel-down situations. **GRADE: A**

**Running backs**—Laurence Maroney showed flashes of everything the Patriots had hoped he would be when they selected him in the first round of last year's draft—power, explosiveness and blazing speed.

Unfortunately, injuries eventually wore him down—from a knee strain in training camp to torn rib cartilage late in the season to a shoulder injury that hampered him in the playoffs and required offseason surgery. Still, with Corey Dillon gone, the job is Maroney's and the team would like for him to become a 300-carry workhorse. But he has to prove he can stay healthy.

It wouldn't be surprising to see the Patriots add more zone blocking to take advantage of Maroney's cutback ability. Last year, his instinct on some power running plays was to turn outside, typically with poor results. Maroney excelled when running behind fullback Heath Evans, who simplified Maroney's hole selection and let him run more aggressively.

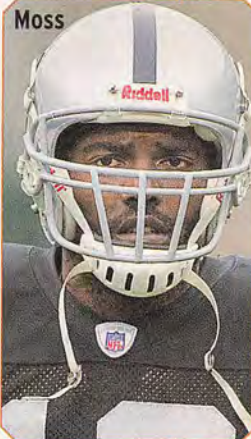
One of the key players in this scheme is Faulk, an excellent receiver and scatback who is particularly dangerous on draws and screens. He often is Brady's safety valve on third down and occasionally even a downfield threat. Free-agent pickup Sammy Morris, a former Dolphin, provides depth. He is solid in most

## SCOUT TAKES

### A scout from another team sizes up the Patriots

**Adalius Thomas** will make them even better because he's an ideal guy to do multiple things in their multiple schemes. He'll be the mismatch guy. He's going to create some hesitation and indecision for some offensive people. ... I don't know how hungry **Randy Moss** is. I didn't see that in his play the last two years like I did in Minnesota. Blame it on whatever you want, but he was not the same competitor. Maybe he can turn it on and turn it off. ... I don't think **Laurence Maroney** can hold up as a feature back because of his style. He's reckless, he runs erect, and he's not mature enough yet to know when to go down. ... **Asante Samuel** makes plays—he had 10 interceptions last year—and he can be physical when he wants to be. He probably should have made the Pro Bowl because of his consistent play.

JAY DROWNS / SN



Moss



areas but a standout in none. He runs hard between the tackles and has decent hands. **GRADE: B**

**Receivers**—Brady trusted few receivers last year. The Patriots took one look at last year's group and decided it wasn't good enough. So they picked up Stallworth and Kelley Washington as free agents, traded for Welker and sent shockwaves through the league with the acquisition of Moss in a draft-day trade.

Provided he's healthy and focused, Moss still can be a difference-maker. He has the ability to stretch a field with double moves, go routes and deep comebacks. Defenders will have to honor the sub-4.4 speed of both Moss and Stallworth on the outside by keeping their safeties deep, which will open up things for Welker and tight end Ben Watson underneath in single coverage against linebackers. It wouldn't be a shock if Welker led the squad in receptions as a safety valve and third-down target.

Watson has off-the-charts physical skills but still hasn't mastered the art of finding the right spot against zones; a number of incompletions were the result of his improper reads.

Because of his size and ability to create mismatches, Washington was expected to fill a red zone need—until Moss was acquired. Now Washington will battle with Reche Caldwell for playing time and maybe even a roster spot.

Because the Pats value matchup advantages that result from two-tight end formations, Kyle Brady and David Thomas will get extensive action alongside Watson. Brady, one of the best in-line blockers in the game, replaces Daniel Graham. Thomas is a solid receiver with good hands and even better instincts, particularly in traffic. **GRADE: A-**

**Line**—With all five starting linemen signed through at least 2009, the Patriots have an opportunity to increase cohesiveness in the trenches.

The Pats value specific types of linemen—big (but not too big), intelligent and quick. The leader of the group is center Dan Koppen, who plays with excellent technique and leverage that make him hard to move in the middle, even when he's matched against players 50 pounds heavier.

The team is strong at both guard spots. Left guard Logan Mankins is ready to ascend to a Pro Bowl level because he's

## SCOUTING REPORTS: OFFENSE

### ↑ Tom Brady, QB

**Strengths:** Has outstanding mechanics, exceptional vision and off-the-charts football intelligence. Processes information quickly and regularly finds his second, third and fourth options. Has great recognition skills and audibles effectively. Handles pressure well. Has a picture-perfect high release, excellent quickness setting up and superb accuracy. Throws an easy-to-catch ball.

**Weaknesses:** Loses accuracy when his feet are not set. Not a great playmaker outside the pocket. An average scrambler.

**Bottom line:** Brady, one of the best quarterbacks of this generation, plays with a quiet confidence. He is a winner who knows he can make a play when his team needs it. **Grade: 9.7**

### ↑ Laurence Maroney, RB

**Strengths:** Runs bigger than his size and is explosive. Has vision, shows patience, makes one cut and gets downhill. Plants and drives through cuts. Doesn't dance or hesitate. Has great change-of-direction skills.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks the bulk to run over defenders and the size to block linemen in protection. Not especially elusive. Not a natural receiver.

**Bottom line:** Maroney has the physical tools to be a feature back, but he must get bigger and stronger to keep from wearing down. **Grade: 8.1**

### Randy Moss, WR

**Strengths:** Has a special combination of size, explosiveness and athleticism. Has good top-end speed, tracks the ball well and is a lethal vertical threat. Dominates jump balls; has good body control and adjusts to throws outside his frame. Reads defenses well and locates soft spots in zones. Has dangerous speed and some elusiveness after the catch.

**Weaknesses:** Runs halfhearted routes when he isn't the primary receiver. Lacks initial quickness and doesn't

always use his hands well against press coverage or sustain blocks. Has serious character issues.

**Bottom line:** Moss has unbelievable talent, which could resurface in the winning atmosphere at New England. With Moss, it's always a question of moods and attitudes. **Grade: 8.5**

### ↑ Donte' Stallworth, WR

**Strengths:** Explodes off the line and uses speed and hands well when breaking the press. Finds ways to get open and is a long-ball threat. Has soft hands, excellent timing and awareness and great leaping ability.

**Weaknesses:** Doesn't do enough to set up defensive backs; tends to rely



MATTHEW KUTZ / SN ARCHIVES

## FANTASY SOURCE PICKS

### STUD

RB Laurence Maroney

### INJURY RISK

WR Donte' Stallworth

### COMEBACK CANDIDATE

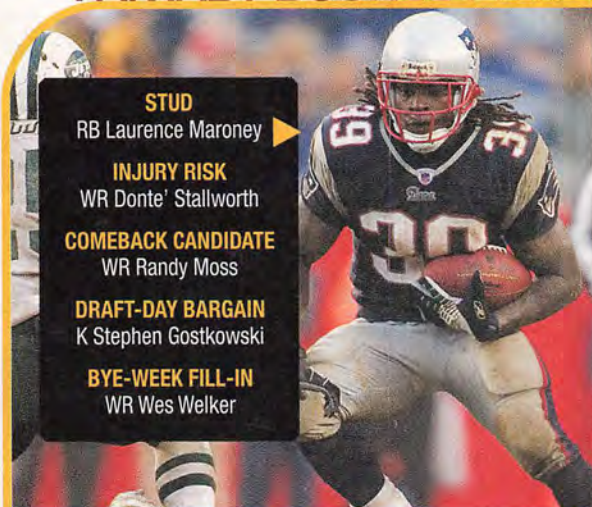
WR Randy Moss

### DRAFT-DAY BARGAIN

K Stephen Gostkowski

### BYE-WEEK FILL-IN

WR Wes Welker



JAY BROWNS / SN

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Players are graded by War Room scouts on a 1-10 scale.  
\*Rookies (not graded)

on speed. Gets sloppy in his routes and suffers concentration lapses. Must improve his blocking. Has durability concerns.

**Bottom line:** The improving Stallworth is on the verge of becoming a consistent playmaker. **Grade: 7.2**

### Ben Watson, TE

**Strengths:** Has great speed and runs excellent vertical routes. Has explosiveness and a second gear to separate against man coverage. Has good hands, makes catches in traffic and can snatch balls away from his body.

**Weaknesses:** Has limited experience because of injuries. Needs to show improvement in his intermediate routes and concentration. Needs better leverage and angles on blocks.

**Bottom line:** If Watson stays healthy, the sky is the limit. He's a matchup nightmare. **Grade: 7.0**

### Kyle Brady, TE

**Strengths:** Has good size. Can lock up opponents and drive them off the ball. Powerful enough to sustain and finish all of his blocks.

**Weaknesses:** Not much more than a short-area receiver. Lacks speed and true quickness.

**Bottom line:** Brady primarily is a blocking tight end, but he handles that role as well as anybody. With Ben Watson and Garrett Mills handling most of the Patriots' receiving chores at tight end, Brady will focus on the grunt work he craves. **Grade: 6.5**

### ↑ Nick Kaczur, T

**Strengths:** Has strong hands and a very quick punch in protection. Locks on to the rusher off the snap, has good knee flexibility and can slide laterally with speed rushers. Plays the game smart and hard.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to sustain better as a run blocker. Gets too aggressive at times and falls off blocks or whiffs. Susceptible to double moves.

**Bottom line:** Kaczur will help protect Tom Brady's valuable body for years to come. **Grade: 7.5**

### Matt Light, T

**Strengths:** Quick with excellent technique. Has good feet, takes great angles and is an outstanding wall-off

blocker. Sets up quickly, moves his feet and can mirror in pass protection. Gets good separation and uses his hands well with balance. Excels on screens, pulls and traps.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks strength and explosiveness. Struggles in power matchups and doesn't anchor well. Struggles one-on-one against the top edge rushers.

**Bottom line:** Light is big, smart and tough, a key figure on the Patriots' front line. **Grade: 7.5**

### Logan Mankins, G

**Strengths:** Has strength at the point of attack and is good with leverage. Uses his hands well to gain position and steer the defender. Plays with a good anchor and is nasty enough to finish blocks. Fundamentally sound.

**Weaknesses:** Can be shaken by quick pass rushers with good moves.

**Bottom line:** Mankins has been a reliable starter from Day 1. **Grade: 7.9**

### Stephen Neal, G

**Strengths:** Has good quickness and plays with leverage. Has strong hands and is a technician. Has a solid anchor and plays with a wide base to hold off bull rushers. Understands how to block countermoves and is solid in blitz pickups. Good on the move and to the second level.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks length and can be beaten by defenders who are active with their hands.

**Bottom line:** Neal is a player who can get better. He plays with a nasty streak and will do whatever it takes to make his block. **Grade: 7.9**

### ↑ Dan Koppen, C

**Strengths:** Has good feet, balance and initial quickness. Screens defenders and uses his hands well. Has good awareness and can slide and pick up the blitz. Can pull, trap and reach second-level blocks. Makes good pre-snap adjustments and keeps the line organized.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks strength and power. Must play with almost perfect technique. Struggles against big nose tackles and doesn't anchor well.

**Bottom line:** Koppen is efficient and heady and makes the most of his abilities. **Grade: 7.5**

**KEY:** ↑ Ascending ↓ Descending

## INSIDERS POLL

Who will emerge as Tom Brady's favorite target? **13**

Randy Moss

Donte' Stallworth

Ben Watson

Wes Welker

Based on a poll of SN's 32 team correspondents

## BOLD PREDICTIONS

**1** Because of injuries, SS Rodney Harrison will not play in more than eight games. Harrison, an inspirational leader, thrives on being doubted, but it looks like the end is near.

**2** WR Randy Moss will become the team's latest reclamation project. He'll channel the ghost of Corey Dillon into a 1,000-yard season and play good soldier while pursuing his first title.

**3** In his second year, K Stephen Gostkowski will challenge for the league scoring lead. He has a huge leg and proved in the playoffs he can make clutch kicks.

nasty whether firing out to run-block or dropping into protection. Just a notch below him is right guard Stephen Neal, a former wrestler who is excellent with his hands, whether blocking in tight spaces or leading on screens.

Tackles Matt Light and Nick Kaczur play with the smarts and precision timing and succeed in the team's running game, which calls for pulls, traps and combo blocks.

If anything goes wrong, there's plenty of depth. Mountainous tackle Ryan O'Callaghan opened eyes last year with his run blocking, and Wesley Britt also provides depth at tackle. Russ Hochstein is a jack-of-all-trades type who can play guard or center. In an emergency, the Pats always can depend on well-traveled guard Gene Mruzckowski. **GRADE: B+**

## DEFENSE

Coordinator Dean Pees moved up from linebackers coach last year, maintained Belichick's 3-4 system and added a few wrinkles. Once a showcase for the team's athletic linebackers, the 3-4 now is built around the dominating line of ends Richard Seymour and Ty Warren and nose tackle Vince Wilfork. They provide serious pass-rush pressure and a hard-to-penetrate wall against the run. Not surprisingly, the Pats set a franchise record last season for fewest points allowed.

**Line**—The big three—Seymour, Warren and Wilfork—all have mastered the responsibilities of gap control, and all three are capable of getting into the backfield when single blocked.

Seymour dominates the right side by occupying multiple blockers on every play. He can change games without recording a tackle. He can line up outside in the 3-4 or at tackle in the 4-3, and his versatility has a domino effect on the rest of the



## SCOUTING REPORTS: DEFENSE

defense. Warren clearly was the team's defensive MVP of 2006. He is too fast for most of the bigger right tackles he faces, and he is almost Seymour's equal in the power department.

Wilfork holds down what might be the most important job on the squad. He holds his ground at the point of attack and keeps multiple blockers from getting a hand on the team's linebackers. Clear of obstruction, they are free to make plays. The front three alone are able to generate a pass rush and often collapse the pocket.

The Patriots stick to their base 3-4 on early downs because they believe it's a better run defense, but they're just as comfortable switching to a 4-3 and rotating in end Jarvis Green or tackle Mike Wright. Green is a right side specialist with no shortage of pass-rush moves. Wright has proved valuable by spelling Wilfork in the middle. Kareem Brown, a fourth-round pick out of Miami, could work his way into the rotation. **GRADE: A**

**Linebackers**—This group, long the lifeblood of Belichick's 3-4, has collectively lost a step. But experience alone makes it formidable, and Thomas provides a needed injection of talent and relative youth (he turns 30 in August).

The leader of the group is Bruschi, a 12-year veteran who missed only one game in 2006 despite playing the entire season with a broken wrist. A healthy Bruschi gives the Pats a playmaker in the middle as well as a savant at diagnosing plays.

His partner in the middle will be either Mike Vrabel or the versatile Thomas, who played just about everywhere in Baltimore. Vrabel is better suited to the outside, where he might be the team's best pass rusher. But his ability to read and react makes him valuable in the middle.

The other outside man is Rosevelt Colvin, a strong pass rusher who occasionally struggles to set the edge in the running game, an absolute must in Belichick's 3-4.

The Patriots lack depth at the position. Eric Alexander, Pierre Woods and Corey Mays will fight for snaps. Alexander, a special teams standout, is speedy and athletic and has a good understanding of the system. **GRADE: B**

**Secondary**—It's easy to look at Asante Samuel's league-leading 10 interceptions last season and assume the Patriots played a lot of man coverage. But the beauty of the team's multiple-look system is the opportunity for cornerbacks to

**Richard Seymour, E**

**Strengths:** Has a nice combination of size, power and athleticism. Plays with natural power and the leverage to excel in a two-gap scheme. Penetrates and beats opponents with quickness. Almost impossible to knock out of the hole. An outstanding in-traffic tackler but also makes plays in space and can adjust on the move.

**Weaknesses:** Could be more consistent. Doesn't make as many impact plays as a premier player should.

**Bottom line:** Seymour draws double-teams and makes those around him more effective. When he's playing at a high level, he dominates. **Grade: 9.0**

**Ty Warren, E**

**Strengths:** Has lower-body strength and explosiveness. Plays with exceptional leverage. Delivers a heavy blow, controls most linemen and gets a good push on run and pass plays. Uses his hands well and always is squared up. Very competitive; fights through traffic and is an excellent finisher.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks elite speed and never will be a great edge rusher.

**Bottom line:** Warren is just what the Patriots look for in a lineman, and he already ranks among the league's best two-gap ends. **Grade: 8.2**

**Vince Wilfork, T**

**Strengths:** Quick and explosive for a player with his massive frame. Has outstanding lower-body strength, anchors well and stacks the hole effectively. Plays with leverage, sheds blocks and has surprising short-area pursuit skills for a power player. Locates ball and breaks down plays; a ferocious tackler.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks long speed. Not a dominant one-on-one pass rusher.

**Bottom line:** Wilfork has been billed as a plugger, but he moves very well and has playmaking ability. He can be dominant when he's in top shape. **Grade: 8.2**

**Adalius Thomas, LB**

**Strengths:** Has unusual versatility. Thick and has a good frame. Can get pressure and disrupt. Does an excellent job of reading the quarterback at the point of attack and makes plays on the ball.

**Weaknesses:** Shows some stiffness as a pass rusher. Often lunges off the

ball and misses. Vision and instincts in the run game are average.

**Bottom line:** Thomas is a big, physical linebacker who knows how to rush the passer. The Patriots will move him around to create mismatches all over the field. **Grade: 8.5**

**Tedy Bruschi, LB**

**Strengths:** Has great lateral mobility and is versatile. Can step up and fill the hole. Has phenomenal instincts and a great feel for slipping blocks. Seldom overruns the hole and is tenacious in pursuit. An outstanding pass rusher, blitz and cover guy. Takes excellent angles and uses his hands well; a textbook tackler.

**Weaknesses:** No longer is young and has lost a step. Lacks prototypical interior size.

**Bottom line:** Bruschi is the heart and soul of the Pats' defense. **Grade: 8.4**

**Mike Vrabel, LB**

**Strengths:** A relentless ballhawk with great first-step quickness and change-of-direction ability. Has a variety of setup moves and head fakes. Uses his long arms and hands to slap away blockers. An outstanding finisher with tremendous instincts. Can cover many backs man-to-man and effectively jam most tight ends.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks elite athleticism and top-end speed.

**Bottom line:** Vrabel has an incredible football IQ. He knows how to get in position to make plays. **Grade: 8.0**

**Rosevelt Colvin, LB**

**Strengths:** Has good change-of-direction skills, is instinctive and can get outside to make plays. Uses his hands well to separate. Shows solid pass-rush technique and a variety of moves. His quick first step is key to most of his success.

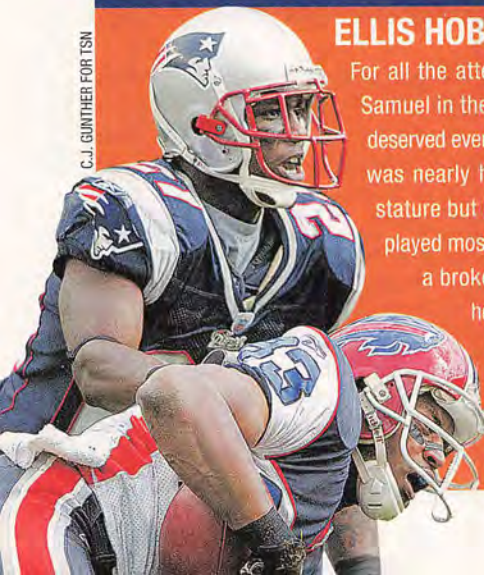
**Weaknesses:** Not very strong at the point of attack and doesn't always play with leverage. Struggles in some coverage situations.

**Bottom line:** Colvin is a good pass-rushing outside linebacker. He has

## SECRET WEAPON

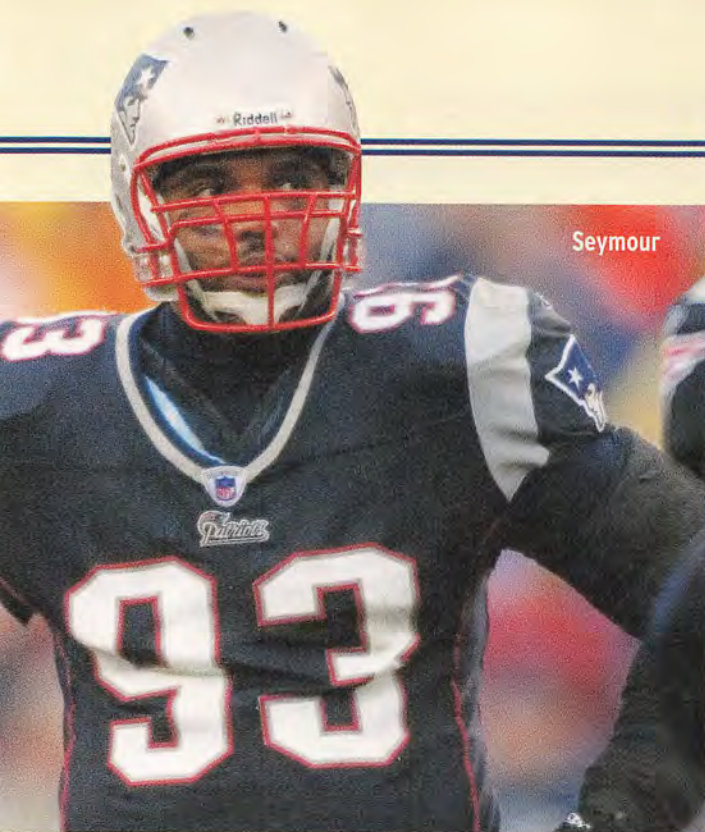
**ELLIS HOBBS, CB**

For all the attention paid Asante Samuel in the playoffs—and he deserved every accolade—Hobbs was nearly his equal. Small in stature but big in heart, Hobbs played most of the season with a broken wrist. Assuming he's healthy, the third-year man could emerge as one of the best right corners in the game.



C.J. GUNTHER FOR TSN

JAY DROWNS / CN



Seymour

improved enough as a run defender to not be a liability in that area.  
**Grade: 7.1**

### Asante Samuel, CB

**Strengths:** A technician who gets great jumps and wastes little motion. Very effective in cover 2. Has good range and some catch-up burst. Seldom is out of position. Adjusts well to receivers coming out of their routes. Has excellent hands and is a great open-field tackler.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal speed. Doesn't turn and run well with speed receivers. Lacks the size to match up with bigger receivers.

**Bottom line:** Samuel is a smart, instinctive player who seldom makes mistakes and almost always is in position to make plays. **Grade: 8.5**

### Ellis Hobbs, CB

**Strengths:** Has good short-area quickness and closing burst. Has fluid hips in space and moves effortlessly from his backpedal to straight-line running. Has good ball skills and hands. Adjusts to and competes for balls in the air.

**Weaknesses:** Not much of a tackler. Lacks ideal size and needs to improve his strength to be more physical in press coverage.

**Bottom line:** He continues to improve. He's smart and won't make mistakes that lead to big plays. **Grade: 7.8**

### ↓Rodney Harrison, S

**Strengths:** Instinctive and wastes little motion. Still is a big-time hitter who excels in the box and run support. Has excellent range and covers more ground than his speed suggests. An outstanding blitz.

**Weaknesses:** Not effective in man-to-man schemes. Can be too aggressive; will gamble and bite on play fakes. His age and physical style are catching up with him.

**Bottom line:** Harrison has been injured a lot the past two seasons. But there is no questioning his heart, toughness and leadership. **Grade: 7.5**

### ↑Eugene Wilson, S

**Strengths:** Has good athleticism and range. Reads plays well, anticipates throws and takes few false steps. Comfortable in man-to-man and covers a lot of ground in zone schemes. Can turn and run with most receivers. A good open-field tackler; slips blocks, avoids contact and makes plays.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks prototypical safety size and strength. Gambles and jumps routes occasionally but has the recovery speed to avoid getting burned often. Has durability concerns after missing 12 games last season.

**Bottom line:** Wilson's versatility is important. He can cover the slot in nickel situations and isn't a liability in man-to-man. **Grade: 7.5**

## KEY MOVES

### 2007 DRAFT PICKS

Rd.-Pick

GRADE **B+**

#### 1-24 Brandon Meriweather, S, Miami

A hard hitter who brings versatility and swagger to a trouble spot.

#### 4-127 Kareem Brown, DT, Miami

Can play end in the 3-4 and can get after the quarterback.

#### 5-171 Clint Oldenburg, OT, Colorado State

Smart, athletic player who can pick up the Pats' system.

#### 6-180 Justin Rogers, LB, SMU

College defensive end who must make the transition to linebacker.

#### 6-202 Mike Richardson, CB, Notre Dame

Was a leader in college, but his lack of speed is an issue.

#### 6-208 Justise Hairston, RB, Central Connecticut State

A tough runner but lacks burst.

#### 6-209 Corey Hilliard, OT, Oklahoma State

Has the ability to play right or left tackle equally well.

#### 7-211 Oscar Lua, LB, USC

Lacks some athleticism for his size (6-0, 238) and has had injury issues.

#### 7-247 Mike Elgin, G, Iowa

Another versatile player who also can play center.

### VETERAN PLAYERS

**Additions:** TE Kyle Brady (FA/Jaguars), CB Eddie Jackson (FA/Dolphins), CB Tory James (FA/Bengals), RB Sammy Morris (FA/Dolphins), WR Randy Moss (trade/Raiders), WR Donte Stallworth (FA/Eagles), LB Adalius Thomas (FA/Ravens), WR Kelley Washington (FA/Bengals), WR Wes Welker (trade/Dolphins).

**Losses:** LB Tully Banta-Cain (FA/49ers), LB Don Davis (retired), RB Corey Dillon (FA), TE Daniel Graham (FA/Broncos), P Todd Sauerbrun (FA/Broncos).

jump routes in zone coverage. Samuel will be joined on the corner by Ellis Hobbs, a scrappy cover man who played virtually all of last season with a broken wrist.

But depth is a concern. Chad Scott turns 33 in September and is suspect anyway. Former starter Randall Gay is coming off two injury-marred seasons, and Willie Andrews is inconsistent. The Pats helped their depth by signing former Bengals standout Tory James, but he's 34 and has lost a step.

There are even bigger questions at safety. Rodney Harrison is coming off a season-ending knee injury, which followed a broken shoulder blade, which followed reconstructive knee surgery. Harrison's ability to diagnose plays, step up in the running game and disguise his blitzes makes him an integral part of the defense, but there's no guarantee he'll be healthy for his 14th season.

The other probable starter is Eugene Wilson, who is athletic and fast enough but appeared in just four games last year because of injury. Other contributors will be Artrell Hawkins, a converted corner; James Sanders, who rebounded from an early-season benching to play effectively; and first-round pick Brandon Meriweather, who brings a much-needed element of speed and could work his way into a starting job. **GRADE: B**

### SPECIAL TEAMS

Belichick, after watching Stephen Gostkowski get two field goal attempts blocked early last season, seldom put his new kicker in a difficult position. The strategy paid off big time. By the



time the playoffs rolled around, Gostkowski was, like predecessor Adam Vinatieri, almost automatic. Gostkowski beat the Chargers with a field goal and then drilled a clutch 43-yarder late in the AFC championship game. The youngster has a huge leg on kick-offs and is more than a viable option on field goals of 50-plus yards.

The Patriots also appear set in the return game: Newcomer

Welker is experienced and capable on punts, and Hobbs is ready to handle kickoffs. Veteran Josh Miller again will be the punter, Lonie Paxton the long snapper and Larry Izzo the leader of the coverage units. Belichick always has been a staunch believer that

special teams play counts for one-third of the game—and the Patriots appear to be well-stocked in this area. **GRADE: A-**

## BOTTOM LINE

How's that for reloading? During the Belichick era, the Patriots have measured success by Super Bowl victories—and on paper, this may be their best team yet. Brady is at the top of his game and has some serious weapons at his disposal, Thomas provides Willie McGinest-type versatility and the defensive line could be dominant.

Based on their offseason moves, the Patriots will be high on most everyone's list of Super Bowl favorites. Just as important, they're motivated. They didn't like the taste left by last year's conference championship loss—and they're determined to get rid of it.

SN

John Tomase covers the Patriots for the Boston Herald.

## PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
QB	▲ Tom Brady ● Matt Cassel	LE	▲ Ty Warren □ Kareem Brown
RB	■ Laurence Maroney ● Kevin Faulk	NT	▲ Vince Wilfork ● Mike Wright
WR	■ Randy Moss ■ Wes Welker	RE	▲ Richard Seymour ● Jarvis Green
WR	■ Donte' Stallworth ● Kelley Washington	OLB	▲ Adalius Thomas □ Pierre Woods
TE	■ Ben Watson □ Garrett Mills	ILB	■ Tedy Bruschi □ Corey Mays
TE	● Kyle Brady ● David Thomas	ILB	■ Mike Vrabel □ Eric Alexander
LT	■ Matt Light □ Wesley Britt	OLB	● Roosevelt Colvin □ Pierre Woods
LG	■ Logan Mankins ● Russ Hochstein	LCB	▲ Asante Samuel ● Chad Scott
C	■ Dan Koppen ● Russ Hochstein	SS	● Rodney Harrison ● Artrell Hawkins
RG	■ Stephen Neal □ Gene Mruczkowski	FS	● Eugene Wilson ● Brandon Meriweather
RT	● Nick Kaczur ● Ryan O'Callaghan	RCB	■ Ellis Hobbs □ Willie Andrews

### SPECIALISTS

K	■ Stephen Gostkowski	KR	■ Ellis Hobbs
P	● Josh Miller	PR	■ Wes Welker
		LS	■ Lonie Paxton

▲ Elite ■ Solid ● Adequate □ Fringe

Depth charts updated weekly at [sportingnews.com](http://sportingnews.com)

## PATRIOTS ROSTER

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL exp.	College	How acq.	2006 GP/GS
QUARTERBACKS							
12	Tom Brady	6-4/225	8/3/77	8	Michigan	D6b/00	16/16
16	Matt Cassel	6-4/230	5/17/82	3	USC	D7a/05	6/0
RUNNING BACKS							
44	Heath Evans (FB)	6-0/245	12/30/78	7	Auburn	FA/05	16/3
33	Kevin Faulk	5-8/202	6/5/76	9	LSU	D2/99	15/1
	Justise Hairston	6-1/210	6/27/83	R	Cent. Connecticut	D6c/07	—
41	Quadrone Hill	6-2/228	11/18/82	1	Miami	FA/06	0/0
39	Laurence Maroney	5-11/215	2/5/85	2	Minnesota	D1/06	14/0
45	Garrett Mills (FB)	6-1/235	10/12/83	2	Tulsa	D4a/06	0/0
34	Sammy Morris (FB)	6-0/220	3/23/77	8	Texas Tech	FA/07	12/4
RECEIVERS							
88	Kyle Brady (TE)	6-6/278	1/14/72	13	Penn State	FA/07	16/14
87	Reche Caldwell	6-0/215	3/28/79	6	Florida	FA/06	16/14
13	Bam Childress	5-10/185	3/31/82	2	Ohio State	FA/05	2/0
10	Jabar Gaffney	6-1/205	12/1/80	6	Florida	FA/06	11/6
17	Chad Jackson	6-1/213	3/6/85	2	Florida	D2/06	12/1
19	Kevin Knight	6-0/213	7/2/82	2	Florida	FA/06	4/1
85	Matt Kranchick (TE)	6-7/260	12/13/79	2	Penn State	FA/06	0/0
	Randy Moss	6-4/210	2/13/77	10	Marshall	T-Oak/07	13/13
81	Jonathan Smith	5-10/194	11/28/81	3	Georgia Tech	FA/06	2/0
18	Donte' Stallworth	6-0/196	11/10/80	6	Tennessee	FA/07	12/11
86	David Thomas (TE)	6-3/252	7/5/83	2	Texas	D3/06	15/3
15	Kelley Washington	6-3/218	8/21/79	5	Tennessee	FA/07	5/1
84	Ben Watson (TE)	6-3/253	12/18/80	4	Georgia	D1b/04	13/13
83	Wes Welker	5-9/190	5/1/81	4	Texas Tech	T-Mia/07	16/2
OFFENSIVE LINEMEN							
62	Brian Barthelme (C)	6-6/300	1/28/83	1	Virginia	FA/06	0/0
65	Wesley Britt (T)	6-8/320	11/21/81	2	Alabama	FA/05	9/1
	Mike Elgin (G/C)	6-4/277	10/15/83	R	Iowa	D7b/07	—
	Corey Hilliard (T)	6-6/315	4/26/85	R	Oklahoma State	D6d/07	—
71	Russ Hochstein (G/C)	6-4/305	10/7/77	7	Nebraska	FA/02	13/0
77	Nick Kaczur (T)	6-4/319	7/28/79	3	Toledo	D3b/05	11/9
67	Dan Koppen (C)	6-2/296	9/12/79	5	Boston College	D5/03	16/16
72	Matt Light (T)	6-4/305	6/23/78	7	Purdue	D2/01	16/16
70	Logan Mankins (G)	6-4/307	3/10/82	3	Fresno State	D1/05	16/16
64	Gene Mruczkowski (G/C)	6-2/305	6/6/80	5	Purdue	FA/03	1/0
61	Stephen Neal (G)	6-4/305	10/9/76	6	CS Bakersfield	FA/01	13/13
68	Ryan O'Callaghan (G)	6-7/330	7/19/83	2	California	D5/06	11/6
	Clint Oldenburg (T)	6-5/297	9/9/83	R	Colorado State	D5/07	—
66	Lonie Paxton (LS)	6-2/260	3/13/78	8	Sacramento State	FA/00	16/0
74	Billy Yates (G)	6-2/305	4/15/80	4	Texas A&M	FA/04	4/3
DEFENSIVE LINEMEN							
	Kareem Brown (T)	6-4/290	1/30/84	R	Miami	D4/07	—
97	Jarvis Green (E)	6-3/290	1/12/79	6	LSU	D4b/02	16/4
91	Marquise Hill (E)	6-6/300	8/7/82	4	LSU	D2/04	4/0
93	Richard Seymour (E)	6-6/310	10/6/79	7	Georgia	D1/01	16/5
90	Le Kevin Smith (T)	6-1/308	7/21/82	2	Nebraska	D6c/06	3/0
92	Santonio Thomas (T)	6-4/305	7/2/81	1	Miami	FA/05	0/0
94	Ty Warren (E)	6-5/300	2/6/81	5	Texas A&M	D1/03	15/15
75	Vince Wilfork (T)	6-2/325	11/4/81	4	Miami	D1a/04	13/13
99	Mike Wright (T)	6-4/295	3/1/82	3	Cincinnati	FA/05	16/4
LINEBACKERS							
52	Eric Alexander	6-2/240	2/8/82	4	LSU	FA/04	14/0
54	Tedy Bruschi	6-1/247	6/9/73	12	Arizona	D3/96	15/14
59	Rosevelt Colvin	6-3/250	5/9/77	9	Purdue	FA/03	16/15
53	Larry Izzo	5-10/228	9/26/74	12	Rice	FA/01	16/0
	Oscar Lua	6-0/238	5/9/84	R	USC	D7a/07	—
46	Corey Mays	6-1/245	11/27/83	2	Notre Dame	FA/06	8/0
	Justin Rogers	6-4/250	8/31/83	R	SMU	D6a/07	—
96	Adalius Thomas	6-2/270	8/18/77	8	Southern Miss	FA/07	16/16
50	Mike Vrabel	6-4/261	8/14/75	11	Ohio State	FA/01	16/16
58	Pierre Woods	6-5/250	1/6/82	2	Michigan	FA/06	8/0
DEFENSIVE BACKS							
23	Willie Andrews (S)	5-10/195	11/2/83	2	Baylor	D7/06	15/0
32	Rashad Baker (S)	5-10/198	2/22/82	4	Tennessee	FA/06	6/0
21	Randall Gay (CB)	5-11/186	5/5/82	4	LSU	FA/04	3/0
37	Rodney Harrison (S)	6-1/220	12/15/72	14	Western Illinois	FA/03	10/10
25	Artrell Hawkins (CB)	5-10/190	11/24/76	10	Cincinnati	FA/05	14/12
27	Ellis Hobbs (CB)	5-9/188	5/16/83	3	Iowa State	D3a/05	15/9
29	Eddie Jackson (CB)	6-0/200	12/19/80	4	Arkansas	FA/07	14/2
28	Tory James (CB)	6-2/186	5/18/73	12	LSU	FA/07	16/16
	Brandon Meriweather (S)	5-11/195	1/14/84	R	Miami	D1/07	—
24	Mel Mitchell (S)	6-1/222	2/10/79	6	Western Kentucky	FA/06	0/0
	Mike Richardson (CB)	5-11/188	2/18/84	R	Notre Dame	D6b/07	—
22	Asante Samuel (CB)	5-10/185	1/6/81	5	Central Florida	D4b/03	15/15
36	James Sanders (S)	5-10/214	11/11/83	3	Fresno State	D4/05	16/5
30	Chad Scott (CB)	6-1/202	9/6/74	11	Maryland	FA/05	14/9
31	Antwain Spann (CB)	6-0/190	2/22/83	2	La.-Lafayette	FA/05	8/0
42	Gemara Williams (CB)	5-8/185	4/30/83	2	Buffalo	FA/06	0/0
26	Eugene Wilson (S)	5-10/195	8/17/80	5	Illinois	D2a/03	4/4
SPECIALISTS							
3	Stephen Gostkowski (K)	6-1/212	1/28/84	2	Memphis	D4b/06	16/0
8	Josh Miller (P)	6-4/225	7/14/70	12	Arizona	FA/04	10/0

Abbreviations: D1-draft pick, first round; W-claimed on waivers; T-obtained in trade; FA-free-agent acquisition.



# JETS

**Another playoff season is possible, but the Jets will be hard-pressed to meet sky-high expectations**

**SN PICK** 2nd, AFC East (9-7)

By RICH CIMINI

If the Jets were to have a soundtrack for the 2007 season, it would be "The End of the Innocence." Cue Don Henley.

After a honeymoon season that exceeded everyone's expectations, second-year coach Eric Mangini returns with largely the same team that finished 10-6 and claimed a wild-card berth.

And you know what that means: The Jets' days as gutsy overachievers are finished.

With his program one year ahead of schedule, Mangini will get his first dose of New York pressure. That's what happens when you give an impatient fan base

that hasn't experienced a Super Bowl in almost four decades an immediate taste of the postseason.

Mangini will stick with the winning formula he used last season, but it will be harder to achieve the same success. The Jets' schedule is tied for fifth-toughest in the league, and their overall talent level won't wow anyone. But they will be well-coached and well-conditioned, and that combo can camouflage a few blemishes.

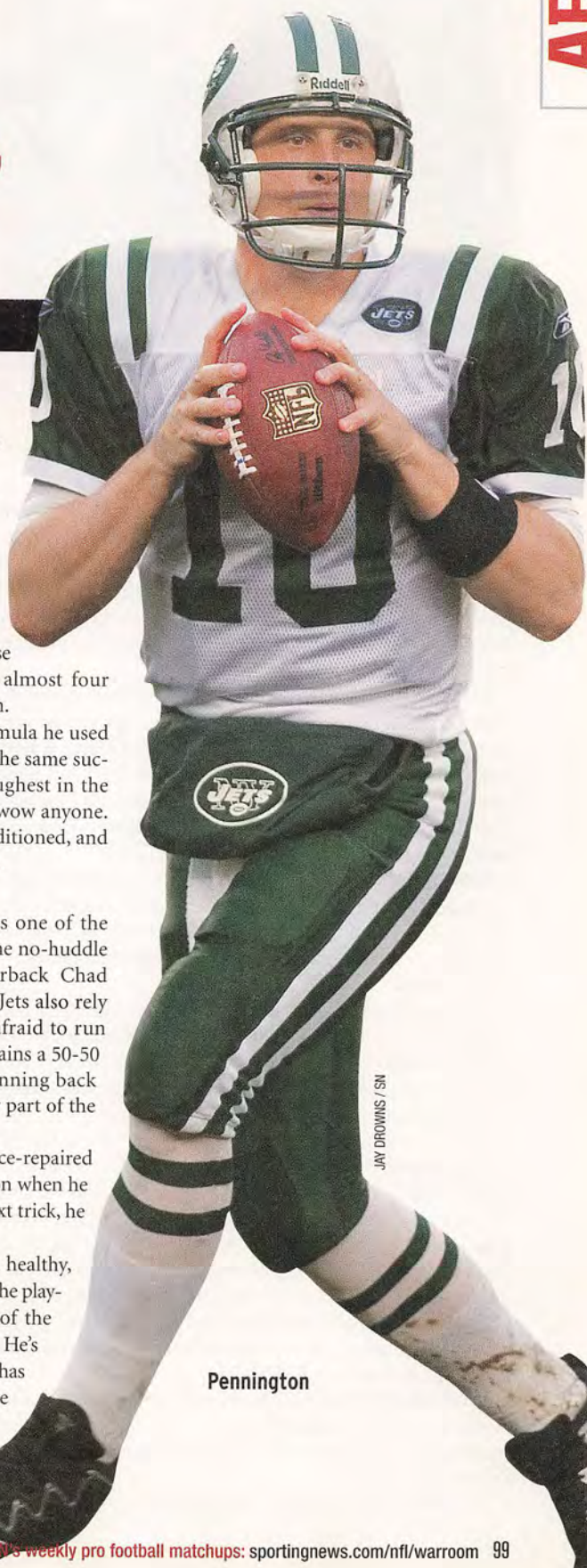
## OFFENSE

Coordinator Brian Schottenheimer runs one of the most diverse offenses in the NFL. He uses the no-huddle whenever possible, which allows quarterback Chad Pennington to orchestrate the attack. The Jets also rely heavily on motions and shifts and aren't afraid to run gadget plays. Through it all, the team maintains a 50-50 run-pass balance. With the addition of running back Thomas Jones, play-action could be a bigger part of the game plan.

**Quarterbacks**—Pennington, he of the twice-repaired throwing shoulder, saved his career last season when he started 16 games for the first time. For his next trick, he must lead the Jets to the Super Bowl.

That's not such a crazy statement. When healthy, Pennington has proved he can lead the Jets to the playoffs—they reached the postseason in each of the three seasons that he started at least 12 games. He's ideal for the team's short passing game, and he has the smarts to read defenses well and change plays at the line to create favorable matchups.

That said, Pennington's lack of arm strength



JAY DROWINS / SN

## SCHEDULE

All times Eastern

Sept. 9	NEW ENGLAND	1:00
Sept. 16	at Baltimore	4:15
Sept. 23	MIAMI	1:00
Sept. 30	at Buffalo	1:00
Oct. 7	at N.Y. Giants	1:00
Oct. 14	PHILADELPHIA	1:00
Oct. 21	at Cincinnati	4:05
Oct. 28	BUFFALO	4:05
Nov. 4	WASHINGTON	1:00
Nov. 11	Open date	
Nov. 18	PITTSBURGH	1:00
Nov. 22	at Dallas†	4:15
Dec. 2	at Miami	1:00
Dec. 9	CLEVELAND	4:15
Dec. 16	at New England	1:00
Dec. 23	at Tennessee	4:15
Dec. 30	KANSAS CITY	8:15

Strength of schedule: T-5th

†Thursday

Analysis of every Jets game:

[sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom](http://sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom)

## REGULAR-SEASON WINS



Pennington



## FANTASY SOURCE PICKS

## STUD

WR Laveranues Coles

## SLEEPER

RB Leon Washington

## BEST RED-ZONE THREAT

RB Thomas Jones

## OVERRATED

QB Chad Pennington

## BYE-WEEK FILL-IN

TE Chris Baker



JAY DROWNS / SN

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restricts the offense. Safeties play closer to the line of scrimmage. Cornerbacks sit on short routes. Opponents can key on the running game. Pennington can function—even thrive at times—under these conditions, but they force him to play near-perfect football. The pressure got to him last season, when he threw a career-high 16 interceptions. Mangini won't tolerate that many mistakes again.

Backup Kellen Clemens, who enters his second season, has many of the same traits as Pennington but has a better arm. Clemens hasn't taken a meaningful snap, and Mangini won't make an in-season change unless the offense falls apart under Pennington. Former Raider Marques Tuiasosopo will compete with Clemens for the No. 2 job, but he'll probably wind up as the third guy. **GRADE: B-**

**Running backs**—For eight years, the Jets just gave the ball to Curtis Martin and—voilà!—had a formidable running game. But when Martin finally broke down last season, Mangini was forced to use four different backs. The strategy didn't work.

Enter Jones.

Acquired from the Bears, Jones is a legitimate No. 1 back whose resume includes two straight 1,200-yard seasons. His presence will allow the Jets to go with more of a power rushing attack rather than having to rely so much on scheme-related runs (draws, misdirections, etc.).

The ground game won't be a one-man show, though. Mangini wants Jones and Leon Washington to form a 1-2 punch. That will reduce wear and tear on Jones, who was most effective in Chicago when he shared the workload. Washington is an ideal change-of-pace back and likely will get the call on third down. He has terrific instincts and acceleration and is dangerous on screens. Cedric Houston will be the No. 3 back.

The Jets altered their philosophy at fullback and brought in a 240-pound thumper, Darian Barnes, who will enable them to use more two-back sets. **GRADE: B+**

**Receivers**—The Jets don't have a big wideout or a legitimate burner to stretch the field. What they do have is a tough, hard-working pair of receivers who excel on short and intermediate routes.

Laveranues Coles and Jericho Cotchery combined for 173

## SCOUTING REPORTS: OFFENSE

## ↑ Chad Pennington, QB

**Strengths:** Has great anticipation and touch on throws. Smart, and makes players around him better. Shows good poise in the pocket. Extremely accurate on short-to-intermediate passes.

**Weaknesses:** Not a threat to run and lacks ideal arm strength. Has below-average quickness on his release. Needs to put a lot of air under his deep ball.

**Bottom line:** After coming back from two surgeries on his throwing shoulder, Pennington actually seemed to have a stronger arm in 2006. If he can stay healthy, he has the talent and supporting cast to be an effective starter. **Grade: 7.6**

## Thomas Jones, RB

**Strengths:** A slashing runner with excellent quickness. Bursts through seams. Can be a home run threat and has a good second gear in the open field. Not a true power runner but can break tackles.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks top instincts. Doesn't finish blocks in pass protection. Lacks confidence as a receiver.

**Bottom line:** Jones has shown he can be a high-caliber starter. Surrounded by a smart quarterback and young, athletic linemen, he could have a career year in 2007. **Grade: 7.1**

## Leon Washington, RB

**Strengths:** A lightning-quick runner with a low center of gravity. Has good change-of-direction skills; finds cut-back lanes and hits the hole hard. Avoids big hits and protects the ball. Has the speed to get to the corner. A smooth receiver who finds soft spots in zones.

**Weaknesses:** Has little value as a short-yardage or goal-line runner; doesn't move the pile. Not a strong blocker.

**Bottom line:** Washington is dangerous as a runner, receiver and kick returner and he has the ability to break a big play every time he touches the ball. But he is undersized and has durability issues, which likely will limit him to a role as a third-down or change-of-pace back. **Grade: 6.0**

## Laveranues Coles, WR

**Strengths:** Has excellent quickness. Makes catches over the middle and in traffic. Finds open spots in zones.

Runs good crossing routes and skinny posts. Can make defenders miss after the catch.

**Weaknesses:** Not a precise route runner and doesn't make crisp cuts. Can get jammed at the line. Has trouble sustaining blocks. Will take plays off.

**Bottom line:** With Chad Pennington back at full strength last season, Coles again became an impact player. Although he has been hampered by injuries in recent seasons, he remains a productive receiver. **Grade: 8.1**

## ↑ Jericho Cotchery, WR

**Strengths:** Dangerous over the middle. Quick and fluid, with good body control. Can stop and start without losing much in transition. Has great recognition skills and nice hands. Plays tough.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal speed. Needs to improve his route-running skills.

**Bottom line:** Cotchery showed his big-play ability in 2006, his first season as a starter. He works well out of the slot and is effective in the Jets' ball control passing attack. **Grade: 7.3**

## Chris Baker, TE

**Strengths:** Has long arms and good hands. Adjusts well to poorly thrown balls. Can stretch the seam vertically. Pulls balls away from defenders in traffic. Has the size and strength to hold up as an in-line blocker.

**Weaknesses:** Must show a more consistent motor. Displays inconsistent blocking technique. Lacks explosive speed.

**Bottom line:** Baker has shown promise as a red zone threat but still is developing as a reliable receiving option. He needs to have a breakout season. **Grade: 6.9**

## ↑ D'Brickashaw Ferguson, T

**Strengths:** Has good height, with the frame to add bulk. Quick and extremely athletic for his size. Packs a powerful punch that reroutes defenders. Takes good angles and plays with leverage. Sets up quickly in pass protection and seldom lets his man get to the quarterback. Can handle outside rushers and double moves.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal lower-body strength. Needs to play more aggressively. Needs to become a more dominant run blocker.

Players are graded by War Room scouts on a 1-10 scale.

\*Rookies (not graded)

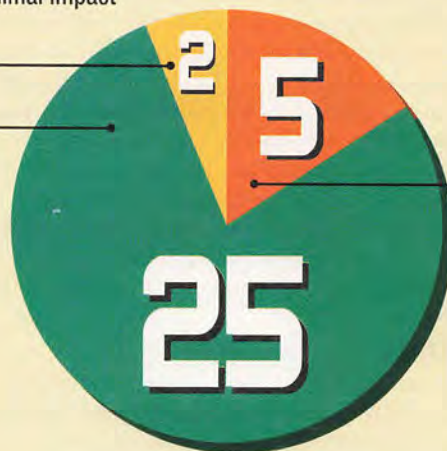
## INSIDERS POLL

### The acquisition of Thomas Jones gives the Jets:

A Curtis Martin clone who will rush for more than 1,300 yards and help the team overtake the Patriots in the AFC East and make a run at the Super Bowl

A solid runner who will allow the team to play ball control but will be no more than a complement to rising big-play back Leon Washington

A ready-to-decline 29-year-old back who will have minimal impact



Based on a poll of SN's 32 team correspondents

## BOLD PREDICTIONS

**1** The run defense, ranked 24th last season, will remain in the bottom third of the NFL. The current personnel simply is suited to the 4-3. Players will be grumbling by midseason.

**2** RB Thomas Jones will rush for 1,000 yards, justifying the offseason trade, but he'll be upstaged by RB Leon Washington in terms of generating electricity for the offense.

**3** By season's end, WR Laveranues Coles will demand a trade. Coles is no fan of Eric Mangini's hard-driving style, and he will look for a new address—a place with a player-friendly coach.

receptions, 2,059 yards and 12 touchdowns last season, and there's every reason to believe those numbers will improve. They're perfect for Schottenheimer's short passing game because they welcome contact and gain yards after the catch. If Cotchery, who's entering his fourth season, continues to ascend, he will force opponents to roll coverage to his side, which would give Coles more one-on-one matchups.

The passing attack would be more dangerous with a third option to provide a threat over the middle. Tight end Chris Baker shows flashes of being that guy, but he's primarily an in-line blocker. Second-year wideout Brad Smith, a converted college quarterback, has immense potential, but it would be asking

**Bottom line:** Ferguson stepped in immediately as the starter at left tackle, and though he suffered some typical rookie growing pains, he showed the skills and athleticism that will make him a perennial Pro Bowl player. **Grade: 8.7**

### Anthony Clement, T

**Strengths:** A big, physical mauler in the running game. Can engulf defenders and has great natural strength. Has a good initial punch and uses his size to force edge rushers wide.

**Weaknesses:** Stiff, with marginal lateral mobility. Struggles one-on-one against quick defenders and can't handle double moves. Weight, stamina and durability are concerns.

**Bottom line:** Clement did an adequate job as a starter for the Jets in 2006, but he's just holding down the position until the team

can find someone better. **Grade: 5.9**

### ↑ Brandon Moore, G

**Strengths:** Has good strength, quickness and toughness. Plays with nice leverage and a wide base. A relentless blocker who takes good angles. Has a strong punch and can anchor against bull rushers.

**Weaknesses:** Displays limited lateral movement. Has trouble readjusting once committed to blocks.

**Bottom line:** Moore, who played defensive tackle in college, seems to get better every year and is a solid starter. **Grade: 7.0**

### ↓ Pete Kendall, G

**Strengths:** Has a wide base, strong upper body and good quickness. Displays sound technique; knows how to use his hands. Instinctive and plays with a mean streak.

**Weaknesses:** Can get caught overextending against quicker tackles. Struggles to mirror and slide in space. Lacks bulk; won't overpower defenders. Lacks mobility and agility.

**Bottom line:** Kendall is the savvy veteran leader of a young line. A classic overachiever, he plays smart and tough but is on the downside of his career. **Grade: 6.8**

### ↑ Nick Mangold, C

**Strengths:** Tough and scrappy, with a strong punch. Fast and athletic; can move in the open field. Reaches line-backers and safeties quickly. Mirrors and slides

well against pass rushers. Recognizes stunts and blitzes and makes great line calls. Seldom gets beat by quick defenders.

**Weaknesses:** Sometimes struggles to hit moving targets. Must gain lower-body strength and play with better leverage. Needs to improve his change-of-direction skills.

**Bottom line:** Mangold picked up the NFL game quickly as a rookie and established himself as the anchor in the middle of the Jets' line. He's a potential Pro Bowl player. **Grade: 8.0**

**KEY:** ↑ Ascending ↓ Descending



JOHN DUINN FOR SN



too much too soon to make him the No. 3 receiver. Slot receiver Tim Dwight, who's recovering from foot surgery, is a question mark. **GRADE: B**

**Line**—The Jets poured the foundation last year, when they drafted left tackle D'Brickshaw Ferguson and center Nick Mangold in the first round, and they expect their young studs to make even greater contributions in 2007. That will be difficult for Mangold, who already is terrific, but Ferguson, the fourth overall pick, needs to play with greater consistency. Ferguson is a gifted pass protector, but he gets pushed around at times, especially in the running game. But if he adds a few more pounds and develops a killer instinct, he will be fine.

The Jets are banking on continuity giving the line a boost—all five starters return from last season—but there are legitimate questions about whether the current group, which also includes guards Pete Kendall and Brandon Moore and right tackle Anthony Clement, can generate enough push in the running game.

This is one of the smaller lines in the league, and that has forced the Jets to become more of a zone-blocking team. They also have to compensate for Clement's weaknesses in pass protection, which force the team to use a potential receiver (most often Baker) as an extra blocker. Though both of the starting guards weigh less than 300 pounds, they are solid.

Backups Wade Smith and Adrian Jones play multiple positions, which creates flexibility along the line. Ed Blanton and Na'Shan Goddard are long shots to give Clement a run for his job. **GRADE: C+**

## DEFENSE

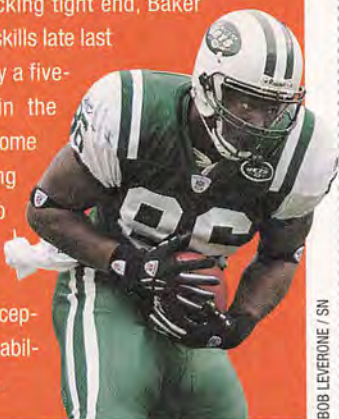
The base defense is a 3-4, but the Jets rarely stay in the same front for an entire quarter, much less a full game. Mangini and coordinator Bob Sutton are creative, especially with third-down packages. Presnap movement is a staple, as the Jets try to disguise their coverages and pressure schemes. They won't hesitate to send an all-out blitz, but after leaning heavily on blitzes toward the end of last season, they hope to scale back on them—if they can generate heat with a conventional rush.

**Line**—The Jets' personnel is better suited to a 4-3 system, but Mangini will stick with his beloved 3-4 and hope nose tackle Dewayne Robertson and left end Shaun Ellis will improve after a season in the two-gap scheme. The team had major transition

## SECRET WEAPON

### CHRIS BAKER, TE

Stereotyped as a blocking tight end, Baker showed his receiving skills late last season, highlighted by a five-catch performance in the playoffs. That opened some eyes on the coaching staff—and could lead to an expanded role for Baker in 2007. With his good hands and deceptive speed, he has the ability to work the seams.



BOB LEVERONE / SN

## SCOUTING REPORTS: DEFENSE

### Shaun Ellis, E

**Strengths:** Has the agility and instincts to generate pressure from the outside and the size and quickness to penetrate as a one-gap interior player. Excels at beating opponents off the snap. Plays with discipline against the run. Tackles explosively.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks elite speed and doesn't have great acceleration around the corner. Lacks bulk as an interior player; must be active to avoid getting engulfed.

**Bottom line:** Ellis has developed into one of the NFL's most complete defensive linemen. He lacks elite pass-rushing speed but can dominate opponents with his power and quickness. **Grade: B.2**

### ↓ Kimo von Oelhoffen, E

**Strengths:** A high-motor player with a feel for the position. Solid on running downs and adept at sniffing out screens. Has excellent initial quickness to penetrate gaps and disrupt plays in the backfield.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks the speed to consistently get out on the edge as a pass rusher. Not a power player; can be engulfed. Sometimes loses his leverage.

**Bottom line:** Von Oelhoffen is a wily vet who plays the game the way it's supposed to be played. He's like an extra coach on the field. **Grade: 7.8**

### Kenyon Coleman, E

**Strengths:** Has good speed and excellent upper-body strength. Uses a variety of pass-rush moves. Plays with sound technique and has solid instincts.

**Weaknesses:** An underachiever who is extremely inconsistent. Lacks lower-body strength, doesn't play with great leverage and can't shed blocks quickly. Doesn't have the stamina of an every-down player.

**Bottom line:** Coleman has the size and strength to hold up in the Jets' 3-4 scheme. He will battle von Oelhoffen for the starting right end job. **Grade: 6.4**

### ↑ Dewayne Robertson, T

**Strengths:** Has a rare blend of size and athletic ability. Uses good awareness and outstanding explosiveness to get penetration. Works best on the move and excels at changing direction. Has great closing speed.

**Weaknesses:** Has yet to show much as a bull rusher. Must add pass-rush moves; gets frustrated when double-teamed in the passing game. Takes plays off.

**Bottom line:** Robertson is a solid starter and showed improvement in 2006, but he isn't the Pro Bowl-type talent the Jets expected from the fourth overall pick in 2003. **Grade: 7.3**

### ↑ Jonathan Vilma, LB

**Strengths:** Has outstanding quickness and agility and an excellent motor. Excels at slipping blocks and hits the hole quickly. Has great range in pursuit; makes a lot of plays on the run. Tackles well in the open field. Can match up one-on-one with most running backs.

**Weaknesses:** Runs around too many blocks; must learn when to use his hands and leverage to take them on. Has long-term durability concerns because of past knee injuries.

**Bottom line:** Vilma had some struggles in the 3-4 last year and needs big, strong players in front of him to tie up blockers. His athleticism and playmaking ability make him a key cog for the Jets' defense. **Grade: 8.4**

### ↑ Bryan Thomas, LB

**Strengths:** Plays with good leverage and uses his long arms to maintain separation. Has become more disciplined against the run and tougher at the point of attack. Displays good power as a pass rusher.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks good anticipation and the agility to execute double moves against most tackles. Has trouble getting off blocks.

**Bottom line:** Thomas flourished in 2006 as a standup pass rusher in the Jets' 3-4, where his speed has made him an impact player. **Grade: 7.4**

### Victor Hobson, LB

**Strengths:** Has nice size and strength and plays with leverage. Has decent coverage skills underneath in zone schemes. Plays with good control and discipline.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks speed, hip fluidity and burst. Must improve his open-field tackling. Lacks range in coverage and closing burst as a pass rusher.

**Bottom line:** Hobson's game isn't pretty, but he uses his size, strength and toughness to contribute as a solid starter outside. **Grade: 6.8**

Vilma



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**Andre Dyson, CB**

**Strengths:** Has good speed and agility. A smooth corner with fluid hips and excellent ball skills. Can recover from mistakes. Has good range in zone and man coverage schemes.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal size and strength. Doesn't press effectively and struggles in the red zone and on jump balls. Not much help in run support.

**Bottom line:** Dyson's lack of size hurts, but he's the Jets' top corner because of his ability to make plays on the ball. **Grade: 7.0**

**Hank Poteat, CB**

**Strengths:** Athletic, with a good short-area burst. Closes quickly and makes plays on the ball. A smart player with experience.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks top-end speed. Often gets pushed around and has trouble with big receivers in the red

zone. Not a great tackler.

**Bottom line:** Poteat is a serviceable corner but probably is best suited to be a nickel corner. **Grade: 6.1**

**\*Darrelle Revis, CB**

**Strengths:** Has the quickness to stay on receivers' hips all over the field. Reads plays well and has good ball skills. Competitive in run support; fights through blocks to make tackles.

**Weaknesses:** Not consistently productive. Must improve his technique and backpedal.

**Bottom line:** Revis has the talent to be a good starting cornerback and is expected to work his way into the Jets' starting lineup this season.

**↑ Kerry Rhodes, S**

**Strengths:** A sure tackler who isn't afraid to jump into plays to make hits. Uses his height to his advantage in coverage. Has good range in center field. Excels in zone coverage and makes plays on the ball. Has the speed and instincts to be an effective blitzer.

**Weaknesses:** Has some stiffness in his hips. Not great at playing man-to-man against wideouts. Lacks the bulk to consistently be effective in

the box in run support.

**Bottom line:** Rhodes is a tackling machine who knows his job and does it well. An aggressive playmaker, he makes an impact in coverage, as a run defender or on blitzes. **Grade: 8.0**

**Erik Coleman, S**

**Strengths:** Displays good diagnostic skills. Has a quick backpedal and nice burst. Shows outstanding anticipation, takes good angles to tackles and has a nose for the ball. Not afraid to mix it up.

**Weaknesses:** Doesn't have great tools. Short and lacks bulk. Lacks true deep speed.

**Bottom line:** Coleman's instincts allow him to play a lot bigger and faster than his measurables would suggest. Already a solid player, he will continue to get better. **Grade: 7.8**

## SCOUT TAKES

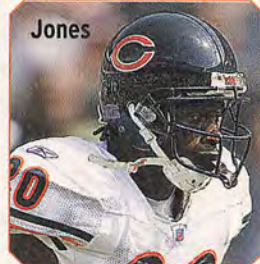
**A scout from another team sizes up the Jets**

I think the combination of **Leon Washington** and **Thomas Jones**

at running back is really good. Most backs in this league can make you miss, but they can't always put multiple moves together. Washington is capable of making multiple moves. ... Defensively, they're still making a transition to the 3-4. I'm not sure **Dewayne Robertson** is a fit for them at nose tackle. They picked up **Kenyon Coleman**, but he's not a difference-maker. ... They need to upgrade their wide receivers.

**Jerricho Cotchery** is a good route runner and has good hands, but he's not a speed guy. **Laveranues Coles** doesn't have great hands. I don't think **Tim Dwight** does anything for them. ... I think they'll probably end up being about where they were last year. They'll win a of couple games they shouldn't, and they'll lose a couple they shouldn't. They should be decent.

Jones



JAY DROWNS / SN

issues last year, and though Robertson seemed to adjust to the nose late, the Jets still surrendered 4.9 yards per rush in the final eight regular-season games.

The team is counting on free-agent pickup Kenyon Coleman, who has experience in the 3-4, to provide an upgrade at right end, with graybeard Kimo von Oelhoffen likely headed to the bench. Coleman is a career backup, so don't expect miracles, but he's a player on the rise and had a career-high four sacks for the Cowboys last season.

At least there won't be as much of a drop-off when Mangini goes to his reserves. Von Oelhoffen, Bobby Hamilton and David Bowens each could contribute 15 to 20 snaps a game off the bench. Bowens, who's undersized but quick, will be an outside rusher on passing downs.

This will be a critical season for nose tackle Sione Pouha, a 2005 third-round pick who missed last season because of a knee injury. He has the classic physique for a nose tackle and is needed to spell Robertson. **GRADE: C+**

**Linebackers**—The spotlight will be on Jonathan Vilma, who struggled last season. His skill set and size make him an ideal 4-3 middle linebacker, but Mangini is hellbent on making the players fit into his system, not vice versa.

The Jets have to find a way to protect Vilma and keep guards out of his face. To his credit, Vilma hasn't whined about his role and vows to make a successful transition. Regardless of the scheme, he brings terrific intangibles to the defense while serving as the signal-caller.

Overall, the linebackers must do a better job against the run and work in sync with the front three. Inside linebacker Eric Barton could be replaced by David Harris, a second-round pick. Harris is a between-the-tackles run stopper with the ideal size and skill set for the 3-4.

Outside linebacker Bryan Thomas, who has found his calling in the 3-4, is expected to build on his breakthrough season. His versatility—he can play up, down, inside or outside—affords



the coaches flexibility in game planning.

The rest of the unit is short on speed, which hurts the perimeter run defense. Outside linebacker Victor Hobson is an effective blitz, but he's not a strong anchor at the point of attack. Matt Chatham, a heady player, provides solid depth on the outside.

The wild card is Andre Wadsworth, the No. 3 overall pick in 1998, who is attempting a monumental comeback after being out of football for six years. He has bad knees but could stick as a situational pass rusher. **GRADE: B-**

**Secondary**—If the Jets blitz as much as they did toward the end of last season, their cornerbacks are going to sue the team for cruel and unusual punishment.

Mangini had to sell out to try to generate a pass rush, sometimes sending seven or eight players after the quarterback and leaving the corners in man-to-man coverage. No wonder the team went through four starters at right corner—David Barrett, Justin Miller, Drew Coleman and Hank Poteat.

All four return, as does steady left corner Andre Dyson, and the group will get a boost from first-round pick Darrelle Revis, arguably the best corner in this year's draft. Revis has the cover skills to play man-to-man and the toughness to provide run support in the cover 2. It would be an upset if Revis isn't starting opposite Dyson at some point this season.

Mangini, a former defensive backs coach, is willing to sacrifice athletic ability for smarts, which explains why a journeyman such as Poteat still is around. Poteat may hold down the starting job until Revis is ready. Miller is the most physically talented of the team's returning cornerbacks, but he's wildly inconsistent and misses too many tackles.

The Jets are fine at safety, where Kerry Rhodes is developing into a two-way force.

He's dangerous near the line,

especially as a blitz, and covers a lot of ground when he's patrolling deep. His sidekick, Erik Coleman, makes too many mental errors, which is the quickest way to earn a spot on Mangini's bench. He will be challenged in camp by Eric Smith, a quick learner who played in some sub packages last season.

#### GRADE: C

### SPECIAL TEAMS

Under coach Mike Westhoff, the Jets always have formidable special teams. The coverage units are excellent, and they have a dynamic kickoff returner in Miller, who led the NFL with a 28.3-yard average last season. He usually gives the offense good field position.

The kicking game is solid if not spectacular. Mike Nugent is developing into one of the NFL's most accurate kickers, but he doesn't have the strongest leg and his kickoffs are short. Ben Graham is known for his big leg and has come a long way as a directional punter. Long snapper James Dearth is as steady as they come.

The unit's Achilles' heel is returning punts; the Jets haven't had a good punt returner since Santana Moss in 2002. Revis,



JAY DROWNS / SN

who had two punt-return touchdowns in college, is the leading candidate for the job. **GRADE: A-**

### BOTTOM LINE

Watch out for the Jets. They're a solid, blue-collar team and extremely well-coached. That alone makes them a contender. True, their 10-6 record last season was a bit of a mirage because of a ridiculously easy schedule, but they addressed their biggest deficiency—running back—and added enough talent to make another run at the Patriots in the AFC East. As for Super Bowl talk—not so fast. The Jets still need a couple of pieces on defense before they can join the elite class. That said, anything less than a playoff berth would be a disappointment. **SN**

*Rich Cimini covers the Jets for the New York Daily News.*

## KEY MOVES

### 2007 DRAFT PICKS

**B+**

#### Rd.-Pick

**GRADE**

**1-14 Darrelle Revis, CB, Pitt**

Extremely smooth cover guy with great hip flexibility. Could return punts.

**2-47 David Harris, ILB, Michigan**

Lacks outside speed, but that's OK in this system.

**6-177 Jacob Bender, OT, Nicholls State**

A developmental prospect. Likely will play on the right side.

**7-235 Chansi Stuckey, WR, Clemson**

Productive when healthy but has had multiple foot injuries.

### VETERAN PLAYERS

**Additions:** FB Darian Barnes (FA/Dolphins), DE David Bowens (FA/Dolphins), DE Kenyon Coleman (FA/Cowboys), DE Michael Haynes (FA), RB Thomas Jones (trade/Bears), QB Marques Tuiasosopo (FA/Raiders), LB Andre Wadsworth (FA).

**Losses:** FB B.J. Askew (FA/Bucs), DE Dave Ball (FA/Panthers), RB Kevan Barlow (FA), RB Derrick Blaylock (FA), QB Patrick Ramsey (FA/Broncos), OT Trey Teague (FA).

#### STADIUM/MEDIA

Giants Stadium (80,282, artificial)

Tickets: 516-560-8200

Training camp: Hofstra University,

Hempstead, N.Y.; 516-560-8288

Radio: ESPN radio (1050 AM)

Website: newyorkjets.com

Ferguson

## PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
QB	■ Chad Pennington ● Kellen Clemens	LE	■ Shaun Ellis ● David Bowens
FB	● Darian Barnes □ Stacy Tutt	NT	■ Dewayne Robertson □ Sione Pouha
RB	▲ Thomas Jones ● Leon Washington	RE	● Kenyon Coleman ● Kimo von Oelhoffen
WR	▲ Laveranues Coles ● Brad Smith	OLB	■ Bryan Thomas ● Matt Chatham
WR	■ Jericho Cotchery ● Tim Dwight	ILB	■ Jonathan Vilma □ Brad Kassell
TE	■ Chris Baker ● Sean Ryan	ILB	● Eric Barton ● David Harris
LT	■ D. Ferguson □ Jacob Bender	OLB	■ Victor Hobson ● Matt Chatham
LG	■ Pete Kendall □ Adrien Clark	LCB	■ Andre Dyson ● Justin Miller
C	■ Nick Mangold ● Wade Smith	SS	▲ Kerry Rhodes ● Rashad Washington
RG	■ Brandon Moore ● Adrian Jones	FS	■ Eric Coleman ● Eric Smith
RT	● Anthony Clement □ Ed Blanton	RCB	● Darrelle Revis ● Hank Poteat

## SPECIALISTS

K	■ Mike Nugent	KR	▲ Justin Miller
P	■ Ben Graham	PR	■ Darrelle Revis
		LS	■ James Dearth

▲ Elite ■ Solid ● Adequate □ Fringe  
Depth charts updated weekly at [sportingnews.com](http://sportingnews.com)

Revis

## JETS ROSTER

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL exp.	College	How acq.	2006 GP/GS
QUARTERBACKS							
6	Kellen Clemens	6-2/223	6/6/83	2	Oregon	D2/06	2/0
10	Chad Pennington	6-3/225	6/26/76	8	Marshall	D1c/00	16/16
8	Marques Tuiasosopo	6-1/220	3/22/79	7	Washington	D2/01	2/0
RUNNING BACKS							
37	Darian Barnes (FB)	6-2/240	2/28/80	6	Hampton	FA/07	16/6
34	Cedric Houston	6-0/223	6/28/82	3	Tennessee	D6a/05	8/1
20	Thomas Jones	5-10/215	8/19/78	8	Virginia	FA/04	16/16
28	Curtis Martin	5-11/210	5/1/73	13	Pittsburgh	FA/98	0/0
45	Stacy Tutt	6-1/233	8/8/82	2	Richmond	FA/06	2/0
29	Leon Washington	5-8/202	8/29/82	2	Florida State	D4b/06	16/8
RECEIVERS							
86	Chris Baker (TE)	6-3/258	11/18/79	6	Michigan State	D3/02	16/14
87	Laveranues Coles	5-11/193	12/29/77	8	Florida State	T-Was/05	16/16
89	Jericho Cotchery	6-0/207	6/16/82	4	N.C. State	D4a/04	16/16
85	James Dearth (TE/LS)	6-4/270	1/22/76	7	Tarleton State	FA/00	16/0
17	Tim Dwight	5-8/180	7/13/75	10	Iowa	FA/06	9/2
18	Frisman Jackson	6-3/217	6/12/79	5	Western Illinois	FA/07	0/0
40	Joe Kowalewski (TE)	6-4/250	11/15/82	1	Syracuse	FA/06	0/0
81	Justin McCareins	6-2/215	12/11/78	7	Northern Illinois	T-Ten/04	16/7
82	Jason Pociask (TE)	6-2/267	2/9/83	2	Wisconsin	D5/06	0/0
88	Sean Ryan (TE)	6-5/265	3/27/80	4	Boston College	FA/06	16/3
16	Brad Smith	6-2/210	12/12/83	2	Missouri	D4a/06	16/3
83	Chansi Stuckey	6-0/185	10/4/83	R	Clemson	D7/07	—
15	Wallace Wright	6-0/191	2/1/84	2	North Carolina	FA/06	5/0
OFFENSIVE LINEMEN							
72	Jacob Bender (T)	6-6/315	4/25/85	R	Nicholls State	D6/07	—
78	Ed Blanton (T)	6-9/330	10/23/82	1	UCLA	FA/06	0/0
61	Adrien Clark (G)	6-5/330	3/26/81	3	Ohio State	FA/07	0/0
68	Anthony Clement (T)	6-8/320	4/10/76	10	Louisiana-Lafayette	FA/06	16/16
60	D'Brickashaw Ferguson (T)	6-6/305	12/10/83	2	Virginia	D1a/06	16/16
76	Na'Shan Goddard	6-5/315	4/23/83	1	South Carolina	FA/06	0/0
79	Adrian Jones (T)	6-5/296	6/10/81	4	Kansas	D4b/04	9/0
66	Pete Kendall (G)	6-5/292	7/9/73	12	Boston College	FA/00	14/14
74	Nick Mangold (C)	6-4/300	1/13/84	2	Ohio State	D1b/06	16/16
65	Brandon Moore (G)	6-3/295	6/3/80	5	Illinois	FA/02	16/16
71	Wade Smith (T)	6-4/318	4/26/81	5	Memphis	FA/06	7/0
DEFENSIVE LINEMEN							
97	Darrell Adams (E)	6-5/282	9/16/83	1	Villanova	FA/07	0/0
96	David Bowens (E)	6-3/260	7/3/77	9	Western Illinois	FA/07	16/0
93	Kenyon Coleman (E)	6-5/295	4/10/79	6	UCLA	FA/07	16/0
92	Shaun Ellis (E)	6-5/285	6/24/77	8	Tennessee	D1a/00	16/16
75	Zarnell Fitch (T)	6-3/320	7/6/83	1	TCU	FA/06	0/0
98	Bobby Hamilton (E)	6-5/285	7/1/71	12	S. Mississippi	FA/06	16/0
94	Michael Haynes (E)	6-4/283	9/13/80	5	Penn State	FA/07	0/0
93	Keyonta Marshall (T)	6-1/325	8/13/81	3	Grand Valley St.	FA/06	0/0
62	Matt McChesney (T)	6-4/307	11/6/81	3	Colorado	W-Sil/05	0/0
77	Rashad Moore (DL)	6-3/324	3/16/79	4	Tennessee	FA/06	13/0
95	C.J. Mosley (T)	6-2/312	8/6/83	3	Missouri	FA/06	5/0
91	Sione Pouha (T)	6-3/325	2/3/79	3	Utah	D3/05	0/0
63	Dewayne Robertson (T)	6-1/317	10/16/81	5	Kentucky	D1/03	16/16
67	Kimo von Oelhoffen (E)	6-4/299	1/30/71	14	Boise State	FA/06	16/16
LINEBACKERS							
50	Eric Barton	6-2/245	9/29/77	9	Maryland	FA/04	16/16
58	Matt Chatham	6-4/250	6/28/77	8	South Dakota	FA/06	16/0
52	David Harris	6-2/239	1/21/84	R	Michigan	D2/07	—
54	Victor Hobson	6-0/252	2/3/80	5	Michigan	D2/03	16/16
55	Brad Kassell	6-3/242	1/7/80	6	North Texas	FA/06	16/0
56	Anthony Schlegel	6-0/250	3/1/81	2	Ohio State	D3a/06	4/0
53	Cody Spencer	6-2/245	6/1/81	4	North Texas St.	FA/06	12/0
99	Bryan Thomas	6-4/266	6/7/79	6	UAB	D1/02	16/16
51	Jonathan Vilma	6-1/230	4/16/82	4	Miami	D1/04	16/16
57	Andre Wadsworth (E)	6-4/272	10/19/74	4	Florida State	FA/07	0/0
DEFENSIVE BACKS							
36	David Barrett (CB)	5-10/195	12/22/77	8	Arkansas	FA/04	13/3
30	Drew Coleman (CB)	5-9/175	4/22/83	2	TCU	D6/05	16/3
26	Erik Coleman (S)	5-10/200	5/6/82	4	Washington State	D5/04	16/14
21	Andre Dyson (CB)	5-10/183	5/25/79	7	Utah	FA/06	15/15
20	Alphonso Hodge (CB)	5-10/203	5/30/82	2	Miami (OH)	FA/06	0/0
22	Justin Miller (CB)	5-10/201	2/14/84	3	Clemson	D2b/05	16/5
31	Hank Poteat (CB)	5-10/195	8/30/77	7	Pitt	FA/06	13/7
24	Darrelle Revis (CB)	6-0/197	7/14/85	R	Pitt	D1/07	—
25	Kerry Rhodes (S)	6-3/208	8/2/82	3	Louisville	D4/05	16/16
33	Eric Smith (S)	6-1/209	3/17/83	2	Michigan State	D3b/06	15/0
38	Jamie Thompson (S)	6-0/192	5/25/83	2	Oklahoma State	FA/06	3/0
41	Raymond Ventrone (S)	5-10/200	10/21/82	2	Villanova	FA/06	0/0
42	Rashad Washington (S)	6-1/217	3/15/80	4	Kansas State	D7d/04	16/0
SPECIALISTS							
7	Ben Graham (P)	6-5/230	11/2/73	3	Deakin (Australia)	FA/05	16/0
1	Mike Nugent (K)	6-0/182	3/2/82	3	Ohio State	D2a/05	16/0

Abbreviations: D1-draft pick, first round; W-claimed on waivers; T-obtained in trade; FA-free-agent acquisition.



OAKLAND

AFC

# RAIDERS

**A new coach, a new quarterback and a new system may not translate to different results**

**SN PICK** 4th, AFC West (3-13)

BY STEVE CORKRAN

**T**he Raiders once boasted of being the Team of the Decades. Now, they are desperate to avoid being labeled the Team of the Decayed.

Such is the challenge facing first-time coach Lane Kiffin as he takes over a team that went to the Super Bowl after the 2002 season but has lost more games than any other team in the four seasons since then.

Kiffin has overhauled predecessor Art Shell's coaching staff, installed his version of the West Coast offense and welcomed a potential franchise quarterback in JaMarcus Russell. He also has challenged his players to join him on a quest to prove a 32-year-old is capable of succeeding as an NFL coach and that the Raiders are capable of restoring the glory they once accepted as the norm.

To help the incumbents try to do that, the Raiders selected Russell with the first pick of the draft and tight end Zach Miller in the second round. They added several more players to an offense that scored a league-worst 12 touchdowns and allowed a league-worst 72 sacks last season. But getting the offense to be as productive as the defense, which ranked third in fewest yards allowed in 2006, is going to take more than new personnel—it's going to take a new attitude.

"You need your players to understand how you're getting them better. I'm not going to be a sit-back head coach. I'm going to be in the middle of it," Kiffin says.

## OFFENSE

Kiffin and his run-minded coordinator, Greg Knapp, envision an offense designed around two backs sharing the load. But strong-armed quarterbacks Russell and Andrew Walter will get plenty of opportunities to stretch the field with deep throws. The tight ends and fullbacks also will play a key role in the passing game. New line coach Tom Cable has implemented a zone-blocking scheme—similar to the one used by the Broncos—in an effort to get more production out of the line, which underachieved last season.

## SCHEDULE

All times Eastern

Sept. 9	DETROIT	4:15
Sept. 16	at Denver	4:15
Sept. 23	CLEVELAND	4:05
Sept. 30	at Miami	1:00
Oct. 7	Open date	
Oct. 14	at San Diego	4:15
Oct. 21	KANSAS CITY	4:05
Oct. 28	at Tennessee	1:00
Nov. 4	HOUSTON	4:15
Nov. 11	CHICAGO	4:15
Nov. 18	at Minnesota	1:00
Nov. 25	at Kansas City	1:00
Dec. 2	DENVER	4:05
Dec. 9	at Green Bay	1:00
Dec. 16	INDIANAPOLIS	4:05
Dec. 23	at Jacksonville	1:00
Dec. 30	SAN DIEGO	4:15

Strength of schedule: T-1st

Analysis of every Raiders game:  
[sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom](http://sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom)

## REGULAR-SEASON WINS





Russell

BOB LEVERONE / SN

**Quarterbacks**—Aaron Brooks was released after he failed to win any of his eight starts last season, but Walter, the only returning quarterback, didn't fare much better in the other eight games. Kiffin, however, is confident that changes in the system, including using the rollout as a staple, will enable Russell, Walter or Josh McCown to succeed.

Russell will be given a chance to earn the starting job, but he figures to need some time to adjust to the nuances of the NFL. Russell's arm strength is matched by few, and he has the size to fend off even the biggest defenders. He needs to cut down on his mental mistakes and avoid forcing the ball into tight spots. Walter or McCown could begin the season as the starter, but Kiffin won't wait long before turning to Russell, especially if the other two falter.

Walter has above-average arm strength and a good feel for the game, but he takes too many sacks and tends to commit turnovers in critical situations. McCown compensates for his lack of arm strength by being accurate and smart with the ball.

This position is a huge question mark entering the season, but there is plenty of growth potential with Russell on board.

#### GRADE: C-

**Running backs**—The ineffectiveness, inconsistency and injuries that punctuated incumbent starter LaMont Jordan's first two seasons with the Raiders prompted the team to pounce on free agent Dominic Rhodes and draft Michael Bush.

The Raiders have faith Jordan can improve the 3.8-yard average he had in each of his first two years with the team. He has decent speed—though not the kind of breakaway speed that scares opposing defenses—and solid hands. The Raiders are counting on the addition of Rhodes and the new system to spark Jordan. Both veterans are accustomed to playing complementary roles, so sharing the workload likely won't pose a problem.

## SCOUT TAKES

### A scout from another team sizes up the Raiders

Whether it was going to be **JaMarcus Russell** or **Brady Quinn**, they had to have a quarterback. The move that went beneath the radar was bringing in **Josh McCown**. He's not the savior, but he could buy Russell a little time so that they don't have to throw him right into the fire. ... It doesn't matter what I think about **Lane Kiffin**. It matters what their players think. Can he gain the respect of the veterans on this team? ... Some people are calling **Robert Gallery** another **Tony Mandarich**. I don't want to go that far, but he definitely hasn't played up to expectations. There's been glimpses of talent, but playing three different positions in his first three years has contributed to his struggles. ... They gave **Terdell Sands** a lot of money, which usually means he's going to start. But I can't see him starting right now over **Warren Sapp** or **Tommy Kelly**.

JOHN DUINN FOR SN



Gallery



Rhodes is a physical runner who doesn't mind pounding between the tackles. If he gets into the open field, he has enough speed to turn a short gain into a long one. He needs to improve his receiving and blocking skills.

Bush is an intriguing prospect but still is recovering from the broken leg he suffered in the 2006 opener. He has impressive size and decent speed but doesn't break enough tackles. Justin Fargas has more speed than Jordan and Rhodes but figures to be the odd man out.

Fullback Justin Griffith was a key addition for a Raiders team that has overlooked the position since coach Jon Gruden left after the 2001 season. Griffith, an effective blocker and an accomplished receiver, will push Zack Crockett for the starting job. **GRADE: C**

**Receivers**—Jerry Porter, Ronald Curry and Doug Gabriel are a solid trio on paper. Getting them to produce to their capabilities will be one of Kiffin's most daunting tasks. The three will benefit from playing in Kiffin's scheme, which is more balanced and less predictable than past Raiders systems. In theory, the receivers won't face as many long distances to make first downs.

Porter didn't play much last season because of a seasonlong feud with former coach Art Shell. He has a combination of size, speed and hands that few receivers possess. He can get open deep and doesn't mind working the middle. However, he tends to disappear for long stretches in games.

Curry came close to playing at the level of a front-line receiver last season. He has above-average speed and great hands, and his background as a former quarterback is a huge plus in route running. Gabriel has shown promise with his above-average speed and decent hands but has had limited playing time in his brief NFL career. He could have a breakout year as the No. 3 receiver.

Veteran Alvis Whitted remains a viable deep threat. Former Lions first-round pick Mike Williams has good size but a history of injuries and inconsistency. The Raiders hope he will be sparked by Kiffin's system, which Williams played in at USC.

At tight end, Miller likely will make a strong push for the starting spot because of his above-average hands and ability to get open on a consistent basis. Miller also has potential to be a solid blocker.

## FANTASY SOURCE PICKS

**STUMBLER**  
QB Andrew Walter

**INJURY RISK**  
RB LaMont Jordan

**RISK/REWARD**  
RB Dominic Rhodes

**DRAFT-DAY BARGAIN**  
WR Ronald Curry

**TOP IDP THREAT**  
DE Derrick Burgess



ALBERT DICKSON / ISN

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## SCOUTING REPORTS: OFFENSE

### \*JaMarcus Russell, QB

**Strengths:** Has the best arm in football—college or pro. Sees the field well and fits passes into tight spots. Has the athleticism to make big plays as a scrambler but won't be confused with Michael Vick. Shows surprising pocket poise for a young player, especially in key situations.

**Weaknesses:** Has inconsistent footwork and motion. When throwing flat-footed or without striding, tends to flick the ball in a three-quarters motion and his accuracy suffers.

**Bottom line:** After a season or two of learning on the job and improving his technique, Russell has the potential to be a top-flight NFL starter for many years.

### LaMont Jordan, RB

**Strengths:** Has excellent size, runs with good power and can wear defenses down. Can push the pile. Turns the corner quickly, shows a second gear in the open field and can run over defensive backs. Has soft hands and is a threat as a receiver.

**Weaknesses:** Has marginal quickness. Not a crisp route runner. Lacks ideal blocking awareness and doesn't always give great effort. Durability is a concern.

**Bottom line:** Jordan has been a disappointment in Oakland. He has been nicked up a lot, so the Raiders signed Dominic Rhodes as an insurance policy. Jordan likely will open the season as the starter, but he must stay healthy. **Grade: 7.4**

### Dominic Rhodes, RB

**Strengths:** Has top-end speed and hits the hole with burst. Plays with very quick feet, and defenders have a tough time getting a clean shot on him. Has good hands. Is a threat out of the backfield.

**Weaknesses:** Not a power player; does not break many tackles. Has marginal vision. Not a blocker. Dives at the feet of the rusher.

**Bottom line:** Rhodes is not a feature back. He is versatile, but he is best suited to be a spot starter and change-of-pace back. **Grade: 7.0**

### Jerry Porter, WR

**Strengths:** Has good speed, shows a second gear when tracking the ball and has the leaping ability to compete for jump balls. Flashes the ability to

make the spectacular catch. Can get open quickly.

**Weaknesses:** Not a great short-to-intermediate route runner and has inconsistent footwork. Lacks good double moves and struggles to create separation underneath.

**Bottom line:** Porter has excellent natural ability and can make big-time plays. After a wasted season, he has a chance to revive his career under a new staff. **Grade: 7.3**

### ↑Ronald Curry, WR

**Strengths:** A tough, competitive, smooth athlete. His route running has become more precise, and he has excellent hands and is solid after the catch. Makes tough catches in traffic and is a physical blocker.

**Weaknesses:** Doesn't have the top-end speed to be effective in the vertical game. Doesn't consistently get separation against man coverage and lacks burst. Durability is a concern.

**Bottom line:** Curry became a viable possession receiver while growing into a starting role in 2006. **Grade: 6.3**

### \*Zach Miller, TE

**Strengths:** Has outstanding hands. Runs sharp and precise routes. Quick off the snap and adept at juking defenders to get open. Smart; finds holes in zone coverage. Has the speed to make big plays. Has the size, strength, balance and agility to consistently gain yards after contact.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks brute strength. Not a dominant blocker.

**Bottom line:** Miller is smart and versatile enough to play in a variety of alignments and could be a better NFL tight end than Greg Olsen, selected earlier in this year's draft by the Bears.

### ↓Robert Gallery, T

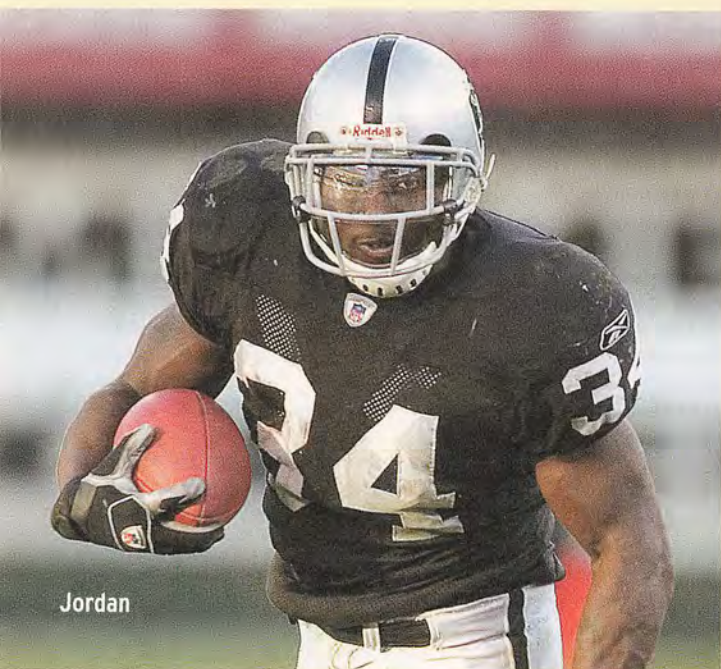
**Strengths:** Has excellent size and a big wingspan. Plays hard and gets to the defender quickly. Gets to the backside to cut off defenders and is an effective blocker in space.

**Weaknesses:** Struggles with double moves. Sometimes gets caught guessing, so he reaches and lunges. Needs to improve his lower-body strength. Struggles to anchor against the bull rush.

**Bottom line:** Gallery has not met expectations in Oakland, but he is an aggressive run blocker who could



Players are graded by War Room scouts on a 1-10 scale.  
\*Rookies (not graded)



Jordan

ROBERT SEALE / SN

excel in Lane Kiffin's run-first scheme.  
**Grade: 7.2**

### Barry Sims, T

**Strengths:** Durable, tough and competitive. Takes solid angles and makes good initial contact. Drives his feet on base blocks and plays under control in space. Has good quickness in pass protection and good stunt awareness.

**Weaknesses:** Blocks with too narrow a base in the running game and sometimes misses on backside reach blocks. Occasionally loses his balance after initial contact and struggles with bull rushers.

**Bottom line:** Sims has the ability to play almost anywhere on the line and might reclaim the left tackle spot.  
**Grade: 6.9**

### ↑ Paul McQuistan, G

**Strengths:** Tall and big, has the frame to add bulk. Packs a powerful initial punch. Has a wide wingspan. Works hard to finish blocks. Has good initial quickness. Locks on well and can engulf defenders.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal athleticism. Must improve footwork and lateral movement.

**Bottom line:** McQuistan is a hard-working player who responds well to coaching. Though he was a college tackle, he's much better suited inside because he can capitalize on his size and strength. **Grade: 6.1**

### Kevin Boothe, G

**Strengths:** Strong, with good size, bulk and athleticism. Has huge hands and long arms. An aggressive, powerful run blocker. Shows good lateral movement. Bends knees naturally. Holds ground against bull rushers.

**Weaknesses:** Durability is a concern after multiple injuries to his ankle and hands in high school and college. Has only marginal speed; struggles at times to reach the second level.

**Bottom line:** Boothe has shown significant improvement in his strength and conditioning. He is smart and has picked up the NFL game quickly.  
**Grade: 5.8**

### Jake Grove, C

**Strengths:** Has an excellent feel for the game. Will drop down and cut defenders and has good snap-and-go quickness. A solid run blocker who can work his way to the second level.

**Weaknesses:** Doesn't dominate in any one area of his game. Lacks ideal athletic ability and needs to improve his bulk and strength in his lower body.

**Bottom line:** Grove is smart, tough and technically sound. He seldom makes mistakes and is a leader on the line.  
**Grade: 7.0**

**KEY:** ↑ Ascending ↓ Descending

## INSIDERS POLL

With JaMarcus Russell likely the QB at some point this season, the Raiders' offense will:

Make the jump to respectability

Make progress but remain one of the worst in the league

Be another car wreck



Based on a poll of SN's 32 team correspondents

## BOLD PREDICTIONS

**1** WR Jerry Porter will thrive in new coach Lane Kiffin's West Coast-style offense and rebound from a 1-catch season in 2006.

**2** After another great season, CB Nnamdi Asomugha will get the franchise tag from the Raiders because they don't want to give him the money he feels he deserves.

**3** Dominic Rhodes will supplant incumbent LaMont Jordan as the lead back by midseason and wind up with the bulk of the carries by season's end.

Behind Miller are Randal Williams, Courtney Anderson and John Madsen, who spent last season jockeying for playing time and getting few passes thrown their way. None emerged as a surefire threat, though each has the ability to get open deep because of above-average speed. All three need to improve their blocking skills, especially considering Kiffin's desire to run the ball more. **GRADE: C+**

**Line**—Four of the five linemen return from a disappointing unit. The team blamed the unit's poor play on the blocking scheme implemented by former line coach Jackie Slater and believes the players are talented enough to succeed in the right system—Cable's zone-blocking scheme. The players won't be expected to hold their blocks for as long, which likely will make them more productive.

Robert Gallery struggled in his first season at left tackle and now faces the prospect of losing his job to the man he replaced, Barry Sims. If so, look for Gallery to move back to the right side, the spot he occupied his first two seasons. Both are solid fundamentally but not dominant on a consistent basis.

Jake Grove and free-agent signee Jeremy Newberry will compete for the center position, but Newberry will be playing on a surgically repaired knee that has yet to be tested. Grove is a solid, smart player but has underachieved. Guards Paul McQuistan and Kevin Boothe played quite a bit as rookies and had the expected growing pains. Both are smart enough and talented enough to mature into long-term starters. Veteran Cooper Carlisle is a solid player who is expected to push



McQuistan and Boothe.

Chad Slaughter, Adam Treu and Corey Hulseby are seasoned veterans who are capable of filling in at several positions without a huge drop-off in production. **GRADE: D**

## DEFENSE

Coordinator Rob Ryan relies more on the talent of his players than X's and O's. His excellent cornerbacks, Nnamdi Asomugha and Fabian Washington, have key roles. They play man-to-man, which frees the safeties to provide support against the run and in coverage elsewhere. Ryan also places a huge premium on his linemen getting pressure on a consistent basis so he doesn't have to rely too much on blitzes.

**Line**—Left end Derrick Burgess is coming off his second straight Pro Bowl season and shows no sign of leveling off. He uses his tremendous speed, strength and determination to keep constant pressure on blockers.

Tackle Warren Sapp has revived his career, and he teams with Burgess to give the Raiders a potent 1-2 punch. Tyler Brayton is a high-effort player who underachieved last season. His job is secure but only until the Raiders find an effective pass rusher to complement Burgess. Kevin Huntley is being groomed for the role.

In his first season as a starter, tackle Tommy Kelly struggled to make plays, especially against the run. The team re-signed Terrell Sands to hedge against that happening again. Sands is bigger, stronger and more consistent; the team won't hesitate to go with him. **GRADE: B-**

**Linebackers**—Last season, this unit transformed itself from a weakness into a strength. All three starters—Sam Williams, Kirk Morrison and Thomas Howard—return, as do key backups Robert Thomas and Ricky Brown.

Morrison has developed into a top-flight player and one of the team's leaders. Howard has the potential to be the best of the bunch because of his superior speed and great instincts. Williams figures to play even more this season, now that he has regained his confidence and the strength in his knee after suffering a torn ACL in 2005.

Thomas would start for many teams and is a key player in Ryan's scheme because of his penchant for finding the ballcarrier before he gets too far past the line. Brown, a hard-working,

## SCOUTING REPORTS: DEFENSE

### ↑ Derrick Burgess, E

**Strengths:** Has good natural instincts and an excellent feel for the game. Plays with a nonstop motor and is a solid one-gap defender. Tough to block because of his tenacity. Has good speed and quickness as a pass rusher and has greatly improved his leverage and strength against the run.

**Weaknesses:** Gets engulfed by elite power running teams. Not overly physical, and his quickness and athleticism are neutralized when he gets locked up.

**Bottom line:** Burgess has developed into a top-tier player at his position.

**Grade: 8.0**

### Tyler Brayton, E

**Strengths:** A high-energy, high-motor player who does an excellent job closing on the quarterback. Uses his hands and long arms well on the bull rush.

**Weaknesses:** Can be a step late off the ball. Not a natural pass rusher and needs to work on disengaging from blocks. Sometimes is out of control in space.

**Bottom line:** Brayton gives 100 percent on every snap. **Grade: 7.1**

### Warren Sapp, T

**Strengths:** Remains a very good athlete for the position and can get down the line and make plays. Has excellent initial quickness, can penetrate and disrupt when turned loose and can stack blocks in-line. Explosive, solid hitter and wrap-up tackler.

**Weaknesses:** Has a tendency to get out of shape. Can be undisciplined and get out of his gaps. Needs to stay healthy.

**Bottom line:** When he is used the right way, Sapp still is an above-average pass rusher in a 4-3 scheme. **Grade: 7.7**

### ↑ Tommy Kelly, T

**Strengths:** A smooth and fluid athlete who changes direction quickly. When he gets leverage off the line, he is hard to handle one-on-one. Has long arms to shed with force. Plays hard and works to get to the ballcarrier.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to improve his instincts and feel against the run and do a better job of protecting his legs against cut blocks.

**Bottom line:** Kelly is a solid player, but he will have to work hard to keep

Terrell Sands from taking his starting job. **Grade: 7.3**

### ↑ Thomas Howard, LB

**Strengths:** Has outstanding speed and size with the frame to add bulk. Makes plays sideline to sideline. Aggressive in pursuit and chases down the ball from behind. Has a nose for the ball, good athleticism and the ability to turn and run.

**Weaknesses:** Can be too aggressive and gets out of position. Must add bulk and upper-body strength. Bites on play-action and is slow to drop into coverage.

**Bottom line:** Howard was not a big playmaker as a rookie but will be better with experience and coaching.

**Grade: 7.6**

### ↑ Kirk Morrison, LB

**Strengths:** Tough, smart and relentless. Has good instincts and is a very smart player. Flows to the ball quickly and is good at picking his way through traffic. Understands the passing zones and is adept at underneath coverage.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks long speed and needs to make plays more on intelligence than true athletic ability. Needs to get stronger at the point of attack.

**Bottom line:** Morrison is an old-school linebacker who was a tackling machine in 2006. He is a player on the rise. **Grade: 7.5**

### Sam Williams, LB

**Strengths:** Has very good size and speed and the athleticism to match up man-to-man in coverage.

**Weaknesses:** Has fought injury problems. Doesn't have natural linebacker instincts. Takes a lot of false steps, often gets behind the ball and is reached too easily by blockers.

**Bottom line:** Williams is a gifted athlete who needs to develop into a football player. **Grade: 6.0**

### ↑ Nnamdi Asomugha, CB

**Strengths:** Has great size, speed and strength. Very good in press coverage and is very physical with his hands when he connects on receivers trying to get off the line of scrimmage. A solid tackler.

**Weaknesses:** Has stiffness in his hips and will guess in coverage. Bites on double moves and peeks into the backfield too much.

**Bottom line:** Asomugha seems to get

## SECRET WEAPON

### TERDELL SANDS, DT

Sands has been waiting for the opportunity to crack the starting lineup, and now he might get it. With his prowess against the run, he could unseat Tommy Kelly as the starter opposite Warren Sapp. The

Raiders re-signed Sands—a high priority for them in the offseason—and are convinced he'll develop into a top-flight player.



ALBERT DICKSON / SN



BOB LEVERONE / SN

better with each game and is developing into a top-tier corner. **Grade: 8.6**

#### ↑ Fabian Washington, CB

**Strengths:** Has outstanding speed, excellent change-of-direction ability, above-average instincts and big-play potential. Breaks on the ball with a burst and can make up a lot of ground in a flash.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to improve his strength in press coverage; will get caught peeking into the backfield too often.

**Bottom line:** Washington has speed to burn and the talent to develop into a top-flight corner, but he must put the two together on a consistent basis to be considered among the league's elite. **Grade: 8.0**

#### ↑ Michael Huff, S

**Strengths:** Can play any position in the secondary and play in any coverage scheme. A solid deep defender who takes good angles to the ball. Has good hands and instincts. Hits like a

linebacker and is comfortable being the eighth defender in the box.

**Weaknesses:** Stiff in the hips and is slow in transition. Won't win jump balls against taller receivers and tight ends. Can be overaggressive and get caught out of position.

**Bottom line:** Huff is a complete player and future Pro Bowler. His versatility, athletic ability and big-play attitude made an immediate impact on the Raider defense. **Grade: 8.5**

#### Stuart Schweigert, S

**Strengths:** Has excellent instincts for the position; always is in the right place at the right time. Chases the ball all over the field and is an aggressive hitter and tackler.

**Weaknesses:** Looks tight in the hips when he turns and runs with a running back or tight end in man coverage. Sometimes plays out of control.

**Bottom line:** Schweigert works hard, loves football and will continue to improve as he gains more experience. **Grade: 6.0**

## KEY MOVES

### 2007 DRAFT PICKS

Rd.-Pick

GRADE **B-**

#### 1-1 JaMarcus Russell, QB, LSU

His size (6-6, 256), arm strength and mobility fit in the offense.

#### 2-38 Zach Miller, TE, Arizona State

Figures to be more of a receiver. Doesn't excel in any one area.

#### 3-65 Quentin Moses, DE, Georgia

Has the speed and moves to create pressure consistently.

#### 3-91 Mario Henderson, OT, Florida State

Must hone technique and add strength. Desire is in question.

#### 3-99 Johnnie Lee Higgins, WR, UTEP

Playmaker needs to become stronger and improve catching skills.

#### 4-100 Michael Bush, RB, Louisville

Recovering from a broken leg. Joins a crowded backfield.

#### 4-110 John Bowie, CB, Cincinnati

Raw but has exceptional speed. A kick return candidate.

#### 5-138 Jay Richardson, DE, Ohio State

Athlete with pass-rush potential. Not accomplished vs. the run.

#### 5-165 Eric Frampton, S, Washington State

Needs work in coverage. A special teamer and potential starter.

#### 6-175 Oren O'Neal, FB, Arkansas State

Mainly a blocker/receiver. Slight chance of making the team.

#### 7-254 Johnathan Holland, WR, Louisiana Tech

Inconsistent. Best shot is as a special teamer.

### VETERAN PLAYERS

**Additions:** QB Josh Booty (FA), FB Justin Griffith (FA/Falcons), QB Josh McCown (trade/Lions), C Jeremy Newberry (FA/49ers), RB Dominic Rhodes (FA/Colts), CB Kris Richard (FA), DT Josh Shaw (FA), TE Tony Stewart (FA/Bengals), TE Fred Wakefield (FA/Cardinals), WR Mike Williams (trade/Lions).

**Losses:** OL Brad Badger (FA), QB Aaron Brooks (FA), DT Lance Johnstone (FA), WR Randy Moss (trade/Patriots), CB Tyrone Poole (FA), QB Marques Tuiasosopo (FA/Jets), OT Langston Walker (FA/Bills).

instinctive player, carved out a roster spot on special teams in 2006 and will play more on defense this season because Ryan plans to use his linebackers on blitzes more to augment the pass rush. **Grade: B+**

**Secondary—**Asomugha and Washington have developed into one of the top cornerback combinations in the league. Their play is critical to the overall success of Oakland's defense because Ryan likes to use his safeties—Stuart Schweigert and Michael Huff—in other capacities. With Asomugha and Washington on the corners, he can do that without fear of it leaving the Raiders exposed in coverage.

As a rookie, Huff struggled at times in coverage against some of the league's top tight ends, but he got better as the season progressed and figures to be a top-flight player for years to come. He bounces around in Ryan's system and often moves up to the line in run support or to blitz. Schweigert is one of the team's top tacklers and a player who has a knack for being involved in more than his share of plays. Neither Huff nor Schweigert is a game-altering player, but they fit well in Ryan's scheme.

Stanford Routt and Chris Carr are solid backups at corner—and both excel against speed receivers. Backup safety Jarrod Cooper's impressive size and speed give him the ability to make a difference. He is big enough and strong enough to play linebacker, if needed. **Grade: B**



## SPECIAL TEAMS

New coach Brian Schneider has the players to boost the special teams from hit-and-miss to top-notch, but a few of those players need to overcome some problems first. Kicker Sebastian Janikowski has a powerful leg but has slumped the past two years. Punter Shane Lechler needs to be more consistent.

## STADIUM/MEDIA

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707-256-1000

Radio: KSFO-AM (560)

Website: raiders.com

Carr's speed, decisiveness and toughness make him one of the league's best on kick returns, but that skill set hasn't translated to success on punt returns. Carr needs to make better decisions, and Schneider will focus his efforts on improving the blocking. Treu

still is one of the NFL's best long snappers and has recovered from the quadriceps injury that sidelined him for part of last season.

The coverage units were spotty, and Schneider is addressing that by emphasizing playing within the scheme. **GRADE: C**

## BOTTOM LINE

The Raiders haven't won more than five games since 2002. They haven't won a division game since 2004. They play in one of the league's toughest divisions, which features teams that appear to be at least as strong as last season. The Raiders' season-opening quarterback won't be the one who was there last year, and he might not even be the same guy who is starting at the end of the season.

That only scratches the surface of what Kiffin faces—and doesn't take into account the pressure of working for hands-on Al Davis. Don't count on a Saints-like worst-to-first season, but this team can't help but be better than last year's 2-14. **SN**

Steve Corkran covers the Raiders for the Contra Costa Times.

## PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

## OFFENSE

**QB** ● Andrew Walter  
● JaMarcus Russell  
**FB** ● Zack Crockett  
■ Justin Griffith  
**RB** ● LaMont Jordan  
■ Dominic Rhodes  
**WR** ■ Jerry Porter  
□ Mike Williams  
**WR** ■ Ronald Curry  
● Doug Gabriel  
**TE** ■ Zach Miller  
● Randal Williams  
**LT** ■ Barry Sims  
■ Robert Gallery  
**LG** ● Paul McQuistan  
■ Cooper Carlisle  
**C** ● Jake Grove  
■ Jeremy Newberry  
**RG** ● Kevin Boothe  
● Paul McQuistan  
**RT** ● Robert Gallery  
■ Chad Slaughter

## DEFENSE

**LE** ▲ Derrick Burgess  
● Kevin Huntley  
**DT** ● Tommy Kelly  
■ Terrell Sands  
**DT** ▲ Warren Sapp  
□ Anttaj Hawthorne  
**RE** ● Tyler Brayton  
● Kevin Huntley  
**OLB** ■ Thomas Howard  
□ Darnell Bing  
**MLB** ■ Kirk Morrison  
■ Robert Thomas  
**OLB** ● Sam Williams  
□ Ricky Brown  
**LCB** ■ Nnamdi Asomugha  
□ Stanford Routt  
**SS** ■ Michael Huff  
■ Jarrod Cooper  
**FS** ● Stuart Schweigert  
● Chris Carr  
**RCB** ■ Fabian Washington  
● Chris Carr

## SPECIALISTS

**K** ● Sebastian Janikowski  
**P** ▲ Shane Lechler  
**KR** ▲ Chris Carr  
**PR** □ Chris Carr  
**LS** ▲ Adam Treu

▲ Elite ■ Solid ● Adequate □ Fringe

Depth charts updated weekly at [sportingnews.com](http://sportingnews.com)



## RAIDERS ROSTER

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL exp.	College	How acq.	2006 GP/GS
QUARTERBACKS							
10	Josh Booty	6-2/221	4/29/75	1	LSU	FA/07	0/0
12	Josh McCown	6-4/212	7/4/79	6	Sam Houston State	T-Dev/07	2/0
2	JaMarcus Russell	6-5/256	8/9/85	R	LSU	D1/07	—
16	Andrew Walter	6-6/233	5/11/82	3	Arizona State	D3a/05	12/8
RUNNING BACKS							
43	Michael Bush	6-2/247	6/16/84	R	Louisville	D4a/07	—
32	Zack Crockett	6-2/240	12/2/72	13	Florida State	FA/99	16/9
20	Adimchinobe Echemandu	6-0/225	11/21/80	4	California	FA/06	4/0
25	Justin Fargas	6-1/220	1/25/80	5	USC	D3b/03	16/6
36	Justin Griffith (FB)	5-11/235	7/21/80	5	Mississippi St.	FA/07	16/11
34	LaMont Jordan	5-10/230	11/11/78	7	Maryland	FA/05	9/8
42	ReShard Lee	5-10/220	10/12/80	4	Middle Tenn. St.	FA/06	16/3
46	Oren O'Neal	6-0/248	9/8/83	R	Arkansas State	D6/07	—
33	Dominic Rhodes	5-9/203	1/17/79	7	Midwestern State	FA/07	16/16
RECEIVERS							
88	James Adkisson (TE)	6-5/230	1/11/80	2	South Carolina	FA/03	2/0
83	Courtney Anderson (TE)	6-6/270	11/19/80	4	San Jose State	D7a/04	16/11
13	Will Buchanan	6-3/185	4/5/83	2	USC	FA/06	1/0
89	Ronald Curry	6-2/210	5/28/79	6	North Carolina	D7/02	16/4
80	Doug Gabriel	6-2/215	8/27/80	5	Central Florida	FA/06	15/5
15	Johnnie Lee Higgins	6-0/180	9/8/83	R	UTEP	D3c/07	—
18	Jonathan Holland	6-0/189	2/18/85	R	Louisiana Tech	D7/07	—
85	John Madsen (TE)	6-5/220	5/9/83	2	Utah	FA/06	15/1
45	Zach Miller (TE)	6-5/259	12/11/85	R	Arizona State	D2/07	—
19	Johnnie Morant	6-4/220	12/7/81	4	Syracuse	D5/04	10/2
84	Jerry Porter	6-2/220	7/14/78	8	West Virginia	D2/00	4/0
84	Tony Stewart (TE)	6-5/260	8/9/79	7	Penn State	FA/07	16/3
47	Fred Wakefield (TE)	6-7/295	9/17/78	7	Illinois	FA/07	16/9
87	Alvis Whitted	6-0/185	9/4/74	10	N.C. State	FA/02	14/13
17	Mike Williams	6-5/229	1/4/84	3	USC	T-Dev/07	8/2
86	Randal Williams (TE)	6-3/235	5/21/78	7	New Hampshire	FA/05	16/10
OFFENSIVE LINEMEN							
67	Kevin Boothe (G)	6-5/312	7/5/83	2	Cornell	D6/06	16/14
65	Cooper Carlisle (G/T)	6-5/295	8/11/77	8	Florida	FA/07	16/16
69	Ben Claxton (G)	6-2/301	7/30/80	3	Mississippi	W-Att/07	0/0
58	Jon Condo (LS)	6-3/250	8/26/81	2	Maryland	FA/06	0/0
76	Robert Gallery (T)	6-7/325	7/26/80	4	Iowa	D1/04	10/10
74	Cornell Green (T)	6-6/315	8/25/76	8	Central Florida	FA/07	14/0
64	Jake Grove (C)	6-4/300	1/22/80	4	Virginia Tech	D2/04	16/16
75	Mario Henderson (T)	6-7/308	10/29/84	R	Florida State	D3b/07	—
79	Paul McQuistan (G)	6-6/313	4/3/83	2	Weber State	D3/06	15/6
61	Chris Morris (C)	6-4/305	2/22/83	2	Michigan State	D7a/06	5/0
60	Jeremy Newberry (C)	6-5/310	3/23/76	10	California	FA/07	10/10
65	Barry Sims (T)	6-5/300	12/1/74	9	Utah	FA/99	11/7
78	Chad Slaughter (G/T)	6-8/340	6/4/78	8	Alcorn State	FA/03	15/6
62	Adam Treu (C/G)	6-5/300	6/24/74	11	Nebraska	D3/97	11/0
63	Mark Wilson (T)	6-6/320	11/11/80	4	California	FA/06	0/0
DEFENSIVE LINEMEN							
91	Tyler Brayton (E)	6-6/280	11/20/79	5	Colorado	D1b/03	16/15
56	Derrick Burgess (E)	6-2/266	8/12/78	7	Mississippi	FA/05	16/16
77	Anttaj Hawthorne (T)	6-3/310	11/15/81	3	Wisconsin	D6a/05	16/0
94	Kevin Huntley (E)	6-7/270	4/8/82	2	Kansas State	FA/06	6/0
93	Tommy Kelly (T)	6-6/300	12/27/80	4	Mississippi State	FA/04	16/16
92	Bryant McNeal (E)	6-4/250	7/13/79	4	Clemson	FA/06	0/0
96	Quentin Moses (E)	6-5/257	11/18/83	R	Georgia	D3a/07	—
98	Jay Richardson (E)	6-6/276	1/27/84	R	Ohio State	D5a/07	—
90	Terrell Sands (T)	6-7/335	10/31/79	7	Tenn.-Chattanooga	FA/03	16/0
99	Warren Sapp (T)	6-2/300	12/19/72	13	Miami	FA/04	16/16
95	Josh Shaw (T)	6-3/305	9/7/79	4	Michigan State	FA/07	0/0
LINEBACKERS							
57	Ricky Brown	6-2/235	12/27/83	2	Boston College	FA/06	13/0
48	Chris Clemons	6-3/240	10/30/81	4	Georgia	FA/07	0/0
50	Isaiah Ekejiuba	6-4/240	10/5/81	3	Virginia	FA/05	12/0
53	Thomas Howard	6-3/237	7/14/83	2	UTEP	D2/06	16/15
52	Kirk Morrison	6-2/240	2/19/82	3	San Diego State	D3b/05	16/16
55	Robert Thomas	6-0/235	7/17/80	6	UCLA	FA/06	16/0
54	Sam Williams	6-5/265	7/28/80	5	Fresno State	D3a/03	15/12
DEFENSIVE BACKS							
29	Darnell Bing	6-2/225	9/10/84	2	USC	D4/06	0/0
21	Nnamdi Asomugha (CB)	6-2/210	7/6/81	5	California	D1a/03	15/15
35	John Bowie (CB)	5-11/190	5/11/84	R	Cincinnati	D4b/07	—
23	Chris Carr (CB)	5-10/180	4/30/83	3	Boise State	FA/05	16/2
40	Jarrod Cooper (S)	6-1/215	3/31/78	7	Kansas State	FA/04	16/0
39	Eric Frampton (S)	6-0/205	2/6/84	R	Washington State	D5b/07	—
24	Michael Huff (S)	6-1/205	3/6/83	2	Texas	D1/06	16/16
38	Kris Richard (CB)	5-11/190	10/28/79	6	USC	FA/07	0/0
26	Stanford Routt (CB)	6-1/190	7/23/83	3	Houston	D2/05	16/2
30	Stuart Schweigert (S)	6-1/210	6/21/81	4	Purdue	D3/04	16/16
22	Duane Starks (CB)	5-10/174	5/23/74	10	Miami	FA/06	4/0
27	Fabian Washington (CB)	5-11/188	6/9/83	3	Nebraska	D1/05	14/14
SPECIALISTS							
11	Sebastian Janikowski (K)	6-2/250	3/2/78	8	Florida State	D1/00	16/0
9	Shane Lechler (P)	6-2/225	8/7/76	8	Texas A&M	D5/00	16/0

Abbreviations: D1-draft pick, first round; W-claimed on waivers; T-obtained in trade; FA-free-agent acquisition.

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# STEELERS

**There's a new coach and a new game plan, but the same old players have to return to form**

**SN PICK** 3rd, AFC North (7-9)

BY GERRY DULAC

**M**ike Tomlin likes to describe himself as a man who has to be measured, a competitor who enjoys "what Sunday brings."

Make no mistake: He will be measured quickly in his new role as coach of the Steelers and not just because the man he is replacing approached iconic status in the NFL.

Tomlin inherits a team that retains most of the key players from its 2005 Super Bowl season, including a marquee quarterback, a 1,000-yard rusher and one of the most disruptive defensive players in the NFL.

"There's a winner, there's a loser," Tomlin says. "You get measured against your peers. You compete, you move on."

Tomlin, a first-time head coach, is the same age (34) as Bill Cowher was when he became coach of the Steelers—a coincidence fans hope means something. Like Cowher, Tomlin also inherits a team that did not make the playoffs the previous season.

But Tomlin, who was the defensive coordinator for Minnesota in 2006, will not be short on talent. His priority will be to get his players to forget last season and get back on track for another AFC North title. The Steelers finished 8-8 but only because they won six of their final eight games.

## OFFENSE

The team will miss coordinator Ken Whisenhunt, who brought the running game back to Pittsburgh and introduced a sense of balance to the offense. The promotion of wide receivers coach Bruce Arians to the role likely will mean additional production from the passing game and more reliance on quarterback Ben Roethlisberger. Arians wants to condense the playbook to allow Roethlisberger and the receivers more time to work on specific plays.

**Quarterbacks**—Cowher said it best a couple of years ago: The Steelers will go only as far as Roethlisberger takes them. That certainly will be true as the team moves forward.

After a glorious 2004 debut in which he led the Steelers to a 13-0 start and a

## SCHEDULE

All times Eastern

Sept. 9	at Cleveland	1:00
Sept. 16	BUFFALO	1:00
Sept. 23	SAN FRANCISCO	1:00
Sept. 30	at Arizona	4:15
Oct. 7	SEATTLE	1:00
Oct. 14	Open date	
Oct. 21	at Denver	8:15
Oct. 28	at Cincinnati	1:00
Nov. 5	BALTIMORE*	8:30
Nov. 11	CLEVELAND	1:00
Nov. 18	at N.Y. Jets	1:00
Nov. 26	MIAMI*	8:30
Dec. 2	CINCINNATI	8:15
Dec. 9	at New England	1:00
Dec. 16	JACKSONVILLE	1:00
Dec. 20	at St. Louis†	8:15
Dec. 30	at Baltimore	1:00

Strength of schedule: T-8th

\*Monday †Thursday

Analysis of every Steelers game:  
sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom

## REGULAR-SEASON WINS





Roethlisberger

2005 encore in which he became the youngest quarterback to win a Super Bowl, Roethlisberger came crashing to the ground—literally and figuratively. He came back from a preseason motorcycle accident and a preseason appendectomy to throw a league-high 23 interceptions. He was sacked 46 times and generally looked confused when opponents began playing lots of cover 2 and cover 3 defenses. Roethlisberger was tentative and uneasy in the pocket and was reluctant to run past the line of scrimmage.

The team brought in former Bengals star Ken Anderson as the new quarterbacks coach to help Roethlisberger, both with his mechanics and his confidence. The talent still is there; all Roethlisberger must do is prove it to himself—and perhaps trust that the offense is built to support him, not rely on him.

If Roethlisberger continues to struggle, the Steelers have one of the best backups in the league. Veteran Charlie Batch has the mobility and arm strength to make plays on the run. He was nearly flawless last season when he played; he threw for 492 yards and five touchdowns without an interception in eight games, one as a starter. **GRADE: A-**

**Running backs**—Willie Parker posted his second straight 1,000-yard season and, despite weighing just 209 pounds, has done it with surprising toughness and durability on inside runs and dispelled the notion he might wear down.

Parker, an undrafted free agent in 2004, rushed for 1,494 yards and 13 touchdowns last season, using his speed to bounce inside runs to the outside. He also has developed as a receiver; he caught 31 passes despite not playing in third-down situations.

An offseason search for a bigger back to complement Parker was futile, and the team re-signed 250-pound Najeh Davenport with the hope that he can be the answer. But

## SCOUT TAKES

### A scout from another team sizes up the Steelers

I think **Ben Roethlisberger** will return to what he's been in terms of a playmaker and improviser. You couldn't expect him to come back and perform at the level of his first two years after what he went through last year. . . . Any time you change coaches, there's going to be an adjustment period. I think **Mike**

**Tomlin** is going to get an understanding of what Pittsburgh football is all about and the players are going to adjust to what his flavor is.

. . . I don't know if **Hines Ward** is the best all-around receiver in the NFL, but you certainly want him on your team. From an intangible standpoint—the toughness and the clutch-play ability—he's one of the top guys.

. . . **Troy Polamalu's** assets are his blitzing ability, tackling ability and range. And his passion for the game. It bounces off the tape how hard he plays.

Ward



ROBERT SEALE / SN ARCHIVES

Davenport is more effective in the open field than between the tackles. Free agent Kevan Barlow is a strong inside runner but primarily was signed to provide insurance.

There's no problem at fullback. Dan Kreider is like a pulling guard who uses his powerful legs to get good explosion at the point of attack. **GRADE: B+**

**Receivers**—Three young, talented receivers make this an area of hope.

The most improvement will be expected from Santonio Holmes, last year's No. 1 pick who made strides before eventually moving into the starting lineup. Holmes finished with 49 catches, second only to go-to veteran Hines Ward.

Holmes has the speed to get deep and make plays. He also runs good routes and could take some of the attention away from Ward, who is one of the top pass catchers in the game. After Holmes, the unit's hope for improvement focuses on Nate Washington and Willie Reid.

Washington, an undrafted free agent in 2005, made 35 catches last season, many of them acrobatic. Reid, a 2006 third-round pick who appeared in only one game because of injury, is the team's fastest receiver and also can be used in the backfield on option plays.

Until Washington or Reid steps up, Cedrick Wilson will remain the team's third receiver. Wilson's performance slipped last season, but he has the speed and skill set (he's a former college quarterback) to be a multidimensional threat.

The team needs to find more ways to take advantage of tight end Heath Miller, an underused receiver and solid blocker. Miller's backup, third-round draft pick Matt Spaeth, is a good receiver who needs to work on his blocking. **GRADE: B**

**Line**—Not only was Roethlisberger sacked 46 times, the team averaged only 4.2 yards per run, a number inflated by Parker's 10 runs of 25 yards or longer. The line did not generate much movement up front.

The exception was left guard Alan Faneca, who remains one of the premier run blockers in the league. When the Steelers run their bread-and-butter counter plays, the pulling Faneca typically leads the charge in search of an end or linebacker—sometimes both.

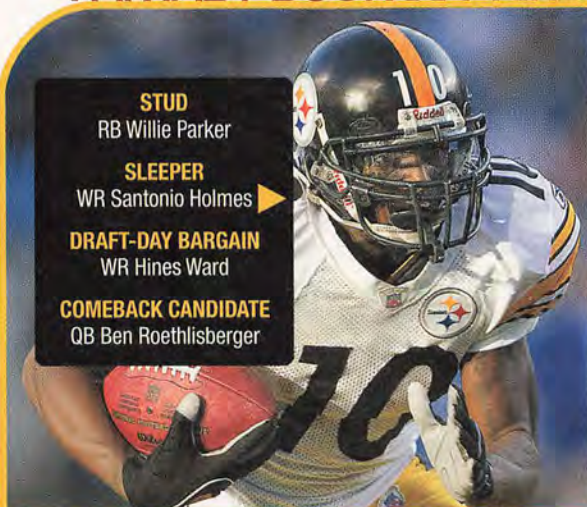
## FANTASY SOURCE PICKS

**STUD**  
RB Willie Parker

**SLEEPER**  
WR Santonio Holmes

**DRAFT-DAY BARGAIN**  
WR Hines Ward

**COMEBACK CANDIDATE**  
QB Ben Roethlisberger



BOB LEVERONE / CSN

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## SCOUTING REPORTS: OFFENSE

### Ben Roethlisberger, QB

**Strengths:** Has a big-time arm and can make any throw. Big and tough, but has enough quickness to make plays with his feet. Can drive the ball and complete passes with arm strength alone. Will make plays on the move and looks to go deep when outside the pocket.

**Weaknesses:** Too often locks on to his primary receiver and forces the throw. Lacks touch on short and intermediate throws; will aim his passes.

**Bottom line:** Roethlisberger, already a winner, still has a ways to go in his development. If new coordinator Bruce Arians can streamline reads for him, he will rank among the top quarterbacks. **Grade: 8.5**

### Willie Parker, RB

**Strengths:** A one-cut runner with outstanding speed. Can score from anywhere. Has very quick feet and explodes to the hole. Has great hands and is a threat out of the backfield.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks vision. Not a power runner; struggles to break tackles. Always looks to bounce outside.

**Bottom line:** Parker is just scratching the surface of his talent. Speed can't be taught, and he has plenty of that. **Grade: 8.0**

### Dan Kreider, FB

**Strengths:** Has toughness and competes hard. Will take on the middle linebacker with good leverage and knee bend. Always drives his feet after contact.

**Weaknesses:** A limited offensive threat. Lacks elusiveness and flair to make plays.

**Bottom line:** Kreider fits Pittsburgh's tough-guy mold. He's a very good lead blocker. **Grade: 6.8**

### Hines Ward, WR

**Strengths:** Tough and competitive. Plays with strength downfield despite not having great size. Uses his body to shield defenders and has excellent hands and concentration in traffic. A good route runner who sets up defenders with double moves. The best blocking receiver in the NFL.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks big-time deep speed. Needs to go in motion to avoid jams and get a clean release.

**Bottom line:** When everything is clicking, Ward is a 1,000-yard possession guy, but he is headed toward the

downside of his career. **Grade: 8.7**

### Santonio Holmes, WR

**Strengths:** Has good, soft hands and can make the tough catches. Runs good routes and gains separation. Explosive and has a great burst in and out of cuts. A threat to score on every touch. Shows a second gear in the open field.

**Weaknesses:** Lets too many balls get to his body. A liability as a blocker.

**Bottom line:** Holmes struggled early in his rookie season but came on strong near the end. He gives the Steelers a sure-handed deep threat on the perimeter. **Grade: 7.3**

### Heath Miller, TE

**Strengths:** Has soft hands and excels as a receiver. Agile enough to adjust to the thrown ball and use his body to shield defenders. Knows how to find soft spots in zones. Strong and mobile enough to gain separation against man coverage.

**Weaknesses:** More quick than fast. Gets good initial contact as a blocker but can't sustain.

**Bottom line:** Miller is a great physical talent with receiving skills and the ability and work ethic to improve as a blocker. He can be an elite NFL tight end. **Grade: 8.0**

### Marvel Smith, T

**Strengths:** Has good athleticism with excellent initial quickness off the snap. Can get to the second level in a hurry. Takes solid angles as a run blocker, pulls well and can get to the backside to make the cutoff block. Plays with solid hand placement in pass protection.

**Weaknesses:** Will expose his chest at times and come off the ball high. Can be leveraged back to the quarterback. Not a pile-mover.

**Bottom line:** Smith still has good upside and the potential to be a Pro Bowl player. **Grade: 7.9**

### Max Starks, T

**Strengths:** Has great size and muscle development. Uses long



Players are graded by War Room scouts on a 1-10 scale.  
\*Rookies (not graded)

arms to keep rushers away from his body. Plays with strong hands and can control the defender off the snap. Has good foot quickness and moves well laterally. Has good balance and body control.

**Weaknesses:** Not fast and struggles to make blocks on the second level. Has below-average flexibility and struggles in space. Will get lazy with his feet late in games.

**Bottom line:** Starks took command of the right tackle spot in 2005 and helped the Steelers win the Super Bowl. He's a star on the rise. **Grade:** 7.2

### Alan Faneca, G

**Strengths:** Tough, nasty and plays with an edge. Hard-working and smart with exceptional vision and awareness.

Takes excellent angles in the running game. Makes a great effort to get downfield and find blocks. Keeps his hands active and in good position.

**Weaknesses:** Can be a little too aggressive in pass protection. Athletic defensive tackles sometimes beat him on his edge.

**Bottom line:** Faneca, a blue-collar type, is the cornerstone of the Steelers' powerful line. He makes everyone around him better. **Grade:** 8.9

### ↑ Kendall Simmons, G

**Strengths:** Has good bulk and plays with a wide base. Takes good angles and can adjust to moving targets. Consistently picks up blitzes and stunts. Seldom gives ground to bull rushers. Has quick feet and seldom gets beat by double moves.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks elite initial quickness and has trouble against edge rushers. Doesn't always play with leverage.

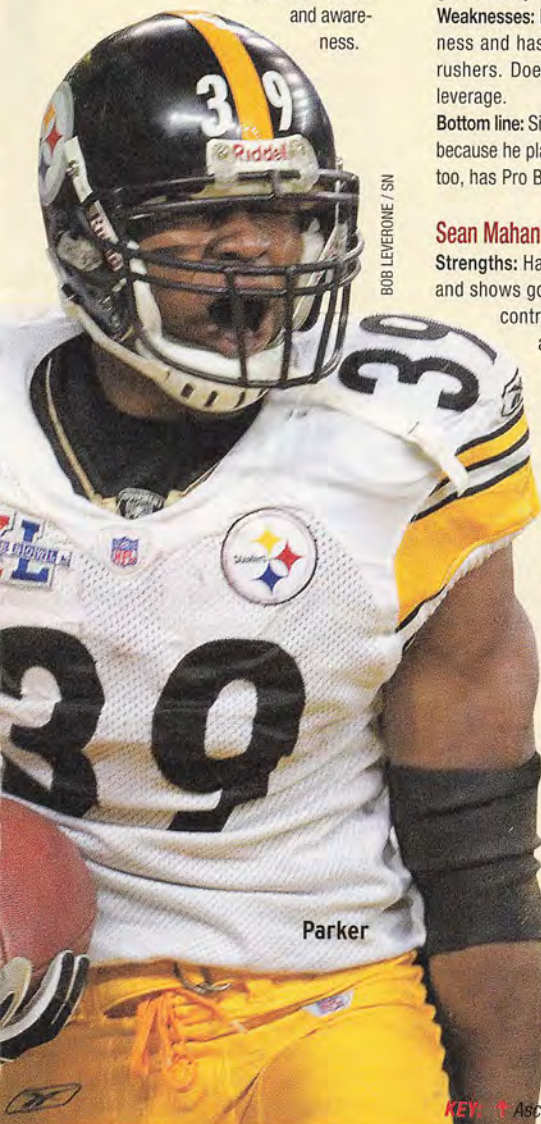
**Bottom line:** Simmons gets overlooked because he plays with Faneca, but he, too, has Pro Bowl ability. **Grade:** 7.5

### Sean Mahan, C

**Strengths:** Has excellent technique and shows good leverage and body control. Plays well in space and can adjust to a moving target. An effective second-level blocker with great quickness off the snap. Does a good job with presnap reads and adjustments.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal strength and power and struggles as a pass blocker. Can get dominated on occasion and never will be able to match up physically with more powerful defensive linemen.

**Bottom line:** Mahan is a solid young starter, and his versatility is invaluable to the Steelers' line. **Grade:** 6.7

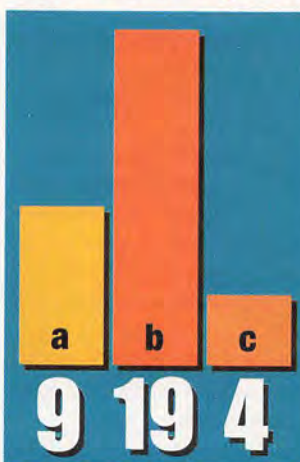


BOB LEVERONE / SN

KEY: ↑ Ascending ↓ Descending

## INSIDERS POLL

Ben Roethlisberger will:



a) Emerge as one of the league's top QBs

b) Tread water as the offense undergoes change

c) Be lucky to finish the season intact

Based on a poll of SN's 32 team correspondents

## BOLD PREDICTIONS

**1** His physical problems behind him, Ben Roethlisberger will bounce back and have the kind of season he had in 2004 and '05.

**2** The defense will miss LB Joey Porter, not so much because of his production but because of the intensity and attitude he brought to the defense.

**3** The offensive line will struggle without C Jeff Hartings, who retired. Hartings covered for some of the shortcomings of RG Kendall Simmons.

Faneca will have to play this season without longtime center Jeff Hartings at his side. Hartings retired and will be replaced by Sean Mahan, the team's key pickup on the free-agent market. Mahan, a converted guard who comes from Tampa Bay, is athletic enough to replace Hartings but will need to improve his technique and toughness to handle some of the mammoth nose tackles in the AFC North. If Mahan staggers, look for 2006 pick Marvin Philip to get a shot.

The problem area is the right side, where tackle Max Starks struggled and guard Kendall Simmons just hasn't been consistent in the running game. Simmons could be pushed by Chris Kemoeatu, who is more physical but doesn't get to the second tier as quickly. Backup tackle Willie Colon is tough and aggressive, but he's not ready to replace Starks, who needs only to develop more tenacity.

Though Marvel Smith seemed to take a step backward last season, he still ranks among the better left tackles in the AFC. Smith has good technique and seldom gets out of position. Behind Smith is Trai Essex, a third-round 2005 pick who has quickness and athleticism but needs to get stronger. **GRADE: C+**

### DEFENSE

Tomlin, a 4-3 kind of guy, will continue using the 3-4 front in 2007, though he'll inject more cover 2 in the secondary and use less one-on-one isolation with the cornerbacks. There also

will be fewer blitzes from the linebackers and, the team hopes, more pressure from the line.

**Line**—Aaron Smith is an end by designation but more of a tackle in the 3-4. He clogs lanes and stuffs the run very effectively, using his hands to maintain balance and play the type of two-gap style preferred by coordinator Dick LeBeau. Even if the Steelers decide to play more 4-3, Smith will adapt quickly because he can play inside or outside.

It's not just Smith. Nose tackle Casey Hampton is almost impossible to move in the middle. He gets great leverage with a powerful lower body and usually ties up two blockers. He is essential to the 3-4 defense because he creates space for the inside linebackers to make tackles. But he, too, will be effective in a 4-3 because he's very athletic and mobile enough to chase down runners on weakside pursuit.

The player who might benefit most from a switch to the 4-3 is end Brett Keisel, an effective pass rusher who gets tied down in the 3-4 with inside responsibilities against the run.

The Steelers can't afford injuries up front because the depth is suspect. Nose tackle Chris Hoke has stepped in before for Hampton and played admirably. But end Travis Kirschke has battled back problems the past two seasons. Fourth-round pick Ryan McBean has the body type the Steelers like and can play inside or at end. **GRADE: B+**

**Linebackers**—With the departure of Joey Porter and a decline in play by this unit as a whole last season, something needed to be done. So the team used its first two draft on outside linebackers Lawrence Timmons and LaMarr Woodley in the hope they will provide more pressure on the quarterback.

James Harrison will open the season as Porter's replacement on the right side, but that might change when Timmons is deemed ready to play. Harrison is smaller than Porter, but he's explosive and powerful—maybe the team's best pass-rushing linebacker. Harrison uses his height to get underneath tackles and his strength to get good leverage.

With Porter gone, responsibility will fall on Clark Haggans, the left outside linebacker, to generate more pressure. Haggans had fewer sacks last season because tackles started forcing him to the inside, where he isn't as effective. Look for Woodley in a lot of third-down situations and in a natural rotation with Haggans.

## SCOUTING REPORTS: DEFENSE

### ↑ Brett Keisel, E

**Strengths:** Has long arms and uses his length well. Plays with leverage off the snap and gets his hands on the blocker quickly. Has a variety of pass-rush moves. Can run well and is very disruptive. Plays with outstanding awareness.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks overall body strength and is not strong at the point of attack against double teams. Lacks a finishing move as a rusher.

**Bottom line:** Keisel, the team's best pass rusher, will have a bigger role in 2007. Hustle, toughness and smarts are the keys to his game. **Grade: 7.8**

### Aaron Smith, E

**Strengths:** Tough, durable and competitive. Plays through the whistle and has an excellent first step. Stout at the point of attack against the run. Comes off the ball hard and gets into the chests of offensive linemen. Consistently gets off blocks and to the ball. Has good backside pursuit and is a physical tackler.

**Weaknesses:** Doesn't show many pass-rush moves. Lacks consistent first-step quickness and explosion.

**Bottom line:** Smith's motor and tenacity are infectious, and he makes his teammates better. **Grade: 7.8**

### Casey Hampton, T

**Strengths:** A stout, physical mauler with excellent strength and the ability to fire off the ball and immediately put opponents on their heels. Plays with leverage and intensity. Has excellent football intelligence and instincts and a knack for finding the ball.

**Weaknesses:** A grinder who is not very athletic or explosive. Not quick off the line and struggles to beat blockers initially; will wear them down over the course of a game. Gets out of position when spinning off blocks.

**Bottom line:** He's the powerful anchor in the middle of the Steelers' defense. **Grade: 9.0**

### ↓ James Farrior, LB

**Strengths:** Tough, physical and competitive. Makes plays all over the field against the run and pass. Has excellent instincts and consistently beats blockers to the spot. Can stand up fullbacks and linemen. Can sift through traffic to make plays, and takes excellent angles in pursuit. Excels in zone coverage; a playmaker and ballhawk.

**Weaknesses:** Can struggle in man coverage and when he must open his hips and run.

**Bottom line:** Farrior is a smart, tough player who simply does an outstanding job without fanfare. **Grade: 8.4**

### ↑ Larry Foote, LB

**Strengths:** Relies on quick instincts and plays with an excellent motor. Plays through and over blockers to get to the outside. Has good speed and range; packs a punch as a tackler.

**Weaknesses:** Not great at playing the run right at him. Not a quick-shed guy when teams run a fullback at him. Can get engulfed at the second level.

**Bottom line:** Foote, a player on the rise, excels because he is surrounded by a great supporting cast in Pittsburgh. **Grade: 7.7**

### Clark Haggans, LB

**Strengths:** A good combination of size, athleticism and strength. Chases the ball all over the field and shows a burst to chase down plays from the backside. Has the size to take on and shed blockers. Shows burst to close on the quarterback. Uses hands well to counter.

**Weaknesses:** Doesn't look smooth flowing laterally across the field in pursuit. Can get fooled by play-action and misdirection plays. Very limited in pass coverage.

**Bottom line:** Haggans has the ability to pressure the pocket and make some plays in the running game. **Grade: 7.5**

### ↑ James Harrison, LB

**Strengths:** Has versatility and is a very good special teams player. An outstanding athlete who is flexible and good in space. Has the ability to explode on a blocker. Plays with great effort; a solid tackler and blitzer.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to improve his strength and play smarter at times. Will give up his body against the run game.

**Bottom line:** Harrison is an up-and-coming player who makes things happen. **Grade: 7.0**

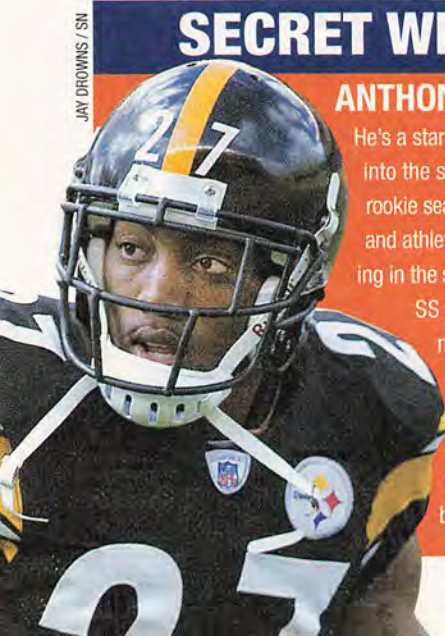
### ↑ Ike Taylor, CB

**Strengths:** Has good speed and strength. Very strong with his jam off the line and can reroute the receiver off the snap. Has good quickness and is very explosive when closing downhill.

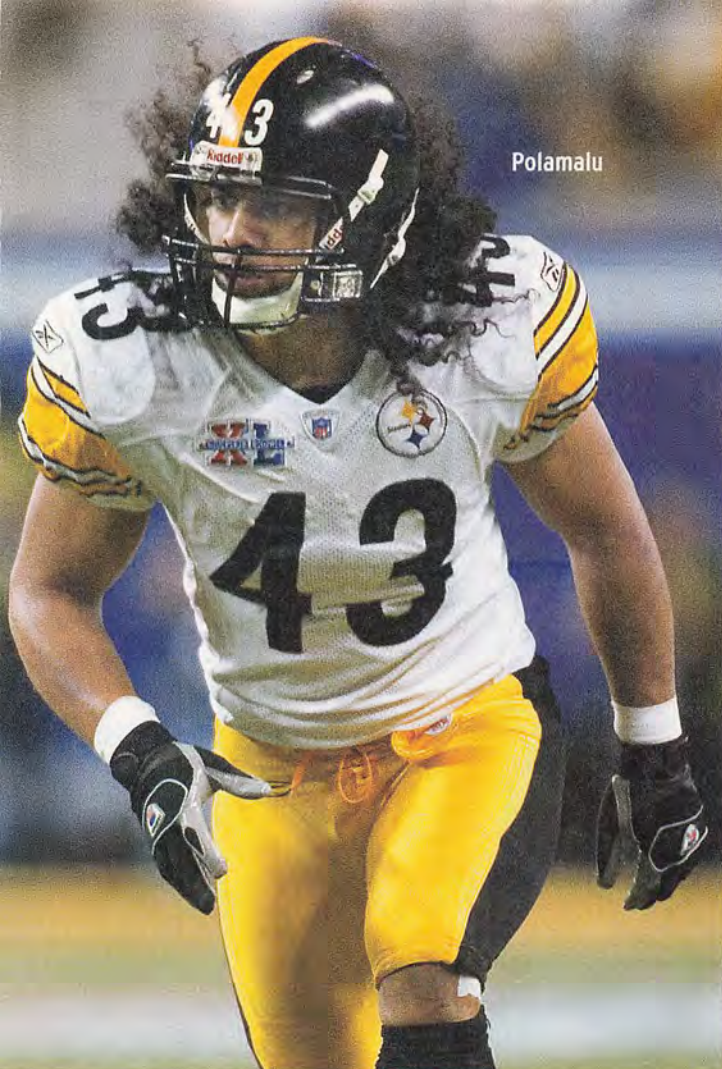
## SECRET WEAPON

### ANTHONY SMITH, FS

He's a star on the rise after moving into the starting lineup late in his rookie season. Smith is fast, smart and athletic, and he's a great pairing in the secondary with Pro Bowl SS Troy Polamalu. What's more, Smith has the ball instincts to make a lot of interceptions, something the secondary doesn't produce in bunches.



JAY DROWNS / SN



Polamalu

JAY DROWNS / SN

Has a good speed turn and is smooth in transition. Has a smooth backpedal.

**Weaknesses:** A reach tackler who does not drive his feet on contact. Has marginal hands and will drop easy interceptions.

**Bottom line:** As Taylor's play began to ascend last season, so did the Steelers'. He can keep getting better.

**Grade: 8.4**

#### ↑ Bryant McFadden, CB

**Strengths:** Has good size and is smart, aggressive and physical. Has excellent recognition skills and seldom gets beat in coverage. Can hold his own in press coverage. Willing in run support.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal size and strength. Not a big-play guy and lacks experience. Plays too safe; is afraid to make mistakes.

**Bottom line:** McFadden has a lot of talent and raw physical skill. He's still growing as a player. **Grade: 7.0**

#### Troy Polamalu, S

**Strengths:** Can play in the box or in space. Has an impressive motor and is very good in pursuit; never gives up on plays. Makes plays all over the field

with his excellent range. Has excellent instincts and straight-line speed for run support. Has the speed and instincts to blitz. Will make plays on the ball in coverage and is a threat to score when he gets his hands on the ball.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to consistently wrap up and finish tackles. Gambles too often and will get out of position. Not fluid when changing direction.

**Bottom line:** Polamalu, the best safety in football, is a top-line playmaker. **Grade: 9.5**

#### ↑ Anthony Smith, S

**Strengths:** An instinctive player who makes quick reads and gets great jumps. Puts himself in position to make plays. Has great ball skills and good hands. A capable blitzing and pass rusher. Fills hard in the running game. A durable, dependable player with passion and intensity.

**Weaknesses:** Not aggressive or physical enough. Has limitations in man coverage.

**Bottom line:** Smith is a heady player who makes up for athletic shortcomings by always being in the right place at the right time. **Grade: 6.8**

Inside men James Farrior and Larry Foote are active and strong, though they didn't make as many big plays last season as they had in 2005. That will need to change. Behind Foote is special teams captain Clint Kriewaldt, who is dependable if not spectacular. But Farrior's backup, Rian Wallace, needs to use his good instincts and play with more consistency. **GRADE: B**

**Secondary**—The strength of this secondary is the safety combo of Troy Polamalu, maybe the most disruptive defensive player in the league, and Anthony Smith, a star in the making.

Strong safety Polamalu is the focal point of the defense, a player who hits like a linebacker and covers the field like a free safety. He has been given free rein by LeBeau, who uses him all over the field to confuse and harass opposing quarterbacks.

Smith, the team's second pick in 2006, has all the tools to be an impact player—athleticism, instincts and ball reaction. He's also a big hitter and, like Polamalu, a difference-maker.

Backing up Smith will be Ryan Clark, the man he replaced. The speedy Clark was signed as a free agent in 2006 to cover Polamalu's back when he gambles. Behind Polamalu is veteran Tyrone Carter, a big hitter who can play both safety positions.

When Ike Taylor, who was considered the team's best corner at the start of last season, got beat in several jump-ball situations and allowed too many deep passes, he was benched by Cowher and didn't start five of the last six games. Taylor needs a good training camp to regain his confidence and ease concerns about his play.

Bryant McFadden probably will start on the other side. He's dependable—solid against the run and respectable against the pass. He could thrive if Tomlin elects, as promised, to take some of the single-coverage responsibilities away from the corners.

There are questions about backups Deshea Townsend, whose play declined significantly in 2006, and Ricardo Colclough, who missed the final 13 games with a neck injury. **GRADE: C**

## KEY MOVES

### 2007 DRAFT PICKS

#### Rd.-Pick

**GRADE B-**

**1-15 Lawrence Timmons, OLB, Florida State**

Will immediately challenge James Harrison as a starter.

**2-46 LaMarr Woodley, OLB, Michigan**

Will be used mostly as a pass rusher.

**3-77 Matt Spaeth, TE, Minnesota**

A good receiver who runs nice routes; must improve as a run blocker.

**4-112 Daniel Sepulveda, P, Baylor**

An athletic, left-footed punter. Will replace veteran Chris Gardocki.

**4-132 Ryan McBean, DL, Oklahoma State**

Needs to develop. A good fit because he can play inside or out.

**5-156 Cameron Stephenson, G, Rutgers**

Shows promise as a run blocker but needs more seasoning.

**5-170 William Gay, CB, Louisville**

A sure tackler and good in run support. Will get a shot in camp.

**7-227 Dallas Baker, WR, Florida**

Has nice size (6-3, 202) but is likely headed for the practice squad.

### VETERAN PLAYERS

**Additions:** RB Kevan Barlow (FA/Jets), G/C Sean Mahan (FA/Buccaneers).

**Losses:** C Jeff Hartings (retired), RB Verron Haynes (FA), WR Sean Morey (FA/Cardinals), LB Joey Porter (FA/Dolphins).

## SPECIAL TEAMS

Special teams coach Bob Ligashesky will have a new punter, Daniel Sepulveda, and a new philosophy to kick off his first season in Pittsburgh. Tomlin says he wants to use some of his best players, even starters, to make the coverage teams more athletic and reliable.

The return game will get an instant boost with the return to health of Reid, who was a record-setting punt returner at Florida State. Reid has speed and the ability to become a consistent game-breaking threat.

## STADIUM/MEDIA

Heinz Field (65,050, grass)

Tickets: 412-323-1200

Training site: St. Vincent College, Latrobe, Pa.; 412-539-8515

Radio: WDVE-FM (102.5)

Website: steelers.com

The Steelers re-signed cornerback Chidi Iwuoma, a longtime special teams ace, after losing unit co-captain Sean Morey as a free agent. Tomlin also plans to use Timmons and Woodley—big hitters with great speed—to fortify coverage units.

Kicker Jeff Reed is dependable, though he sometimes struggles with his footing on home turf, where he missed four kicks inside 36 yards last season. Fourth-round pick Sepulveda, an athletic left-footer, will replace Chris Gardocki. **GRADE: C**

## BOTTOM LINE

The Steelers still have most of the players from their 2005 Super Bowl team along with such promising youngsters as Holmes and Anthony Smith. But it all comes down to Roethlisberger. If he plays like he did in 2005, the Steelers are more than just a playoff team; they're a potential division champ. If he plays like he did in 2006, the team will fight for wild-card scraps. **SN**

Gerry Dulac covers the Steelers for the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.

## PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
QB	▲ Ben Roethlisberger	LE	■ Aaron Smith
	■ Charlie Batch		● Ryan McBean
FB	■ Dan Kreider	NT	▲ Casey Hampton
			□ Chris Hoke
RB	▲ Willie Parker	RE	■ Brett Keisel
	● Najeh Davenport		□ Travis Kirschke
WR	▲ Hines Ward	OLB	■ James Harrison
	■ Nate Washington		■ Lawrence Timmons
WR	■ Antonio Holmes	ILB	▲ James Farrior
	● Cedrick Wilson		□ Rian Wallace
TE	▲ Heath Miller	ILB	■ Larry Foote
	● Matt Spaeth		□ Clint Kriewaldt
LT	■ Marvel Smith	OLB	■ Clark Haggans
	● Trai Essex		■ LaMarr Woodley
LG	▲ Alan Faneca	LCB	■ Ike Taylor
	● Cameron Stephenson		● Deshaea Townsend
C	■ Sean Mahan	SS	▲ Troy Polamalu
	□ Marvin Philip		● Tyrone Carter
RG	● Kendall Simmons	FS	■ Anthony Smith
	● Chris Kemoeatu		■ Ryan Clark
RT	■ Max Starks	RCB	● Bryant McFadden
	□ Willie Colon		● Ricardo Colclough

## SPECIALISTS

K	■ Jeff Reed	KR	■ Willie Reid
P	■ Daniel Sepulveda	PR	■ Willie Reid
		LS	■ Greg Warren

▲ Elite ■ Solid ● Adequate □ Fringe

Depth charts updated weekly at [sportingnews.com](http://sportingnews.com)



Timmons

BOB LEVERONE / SN

## STEELERS ROSTER

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL exp.	College	How acq.	2006 GP/GS
QUARTERBACKS							
16	Charlie Batch	6-2/220	12/5/74	10	Eastern Michigan	FA/02	8/1
5	Bryan Randall	6-0/228	8/16/83	3	Virginia Tech	FA/07	0/0
7	Ben Roethlisberger	6-5/241	3/2/82	4	Miami (Ohio)	D1/04	15/15
2	Brian St. Pierre	6-3/230	11/28/79	3	Boston College	FA/05	0/0
RUNNING BACKS							
22	Kevan Barlow	6-1/238	1/7/79	7	Pittsburgh	FA/07	12/3
44	Najeh Davenport	6-1/250	2/8/79	6	Miami	FA/06	13/0
38	Carey Davis (FB)	5-10/225	3/27/81	2	Illinois	FA/06	0/0
35	Dan Kreider (FB)	5-11/255	3/11/77	8	New Hampshire	FA/00	16/12
42	John Kuhn	6-0/255	9/9/82	2	Shippensburg	FA/05	9/0
39	Willie Parker	5-10/209	11/11/80	4	North Carolina	FA/04	16/16
RECEIVERS							
81	Dallas Baker	6-3/206	11/10/82	R	Florida	D7/07	—
88	Jonathan Dekker (TE)	6-5/250	5/15/83	1	Princeton	FA/06	0/0
10	Santonio Holmes	5-11/189	3/3/84	2	Ohio State	D1/06	16/4
89	Rasheed Marshall	5-11/185	7/11/81	2	West Virginia	FA/07	0/0
83	Heath Miller (TE)	6-5/255	10/22/82	3	Virginia	D1/05	16/16
15	Willie Reid	5-10/189	9/19/82	2	Florida State	D3b/06	1/0
89	Matt Spaeth (TE)	6-7/270	11/24/84	R	Minnesota	D3/07	—
84	Jerame Tuman (TE)	6-4/253	3/24/76	9	Michigan	FA/03	15/4
19	Gerran Walker	5-10/185	10/2/83	1	Lehigh	FA/07	0/0
86	Hines Ward	6-0/205	3/8/76	10	Georgia	D3b/98	14/14
85	Nate Washington	6-1/185	8/28/83	3	Tiffin	FA/05	16/2
80	Cedrick Wilson	5-10/183	12/17/78	7	Tennessee	FA/05	15/12
18	Walter Young	6-4/220	12/7/79	3	Illinois	FA/05	2/0
OFFENSIVE LINEMEN							
74	Willie Colon (G/T)	6-3/315	4/9/83	2	Hofstra	D4a/06	2/2
79	Trai Essex (T)	6-4/324	12/5/82	3	Northwestern	D3/05	15/0
66	Alan Faneca (G)	6-5/307	12/7/76	10	LSU	D1/98	16/16
68	Chris Kemoeatu (G)	6-3/344	1/4/83	3	Utah	D6/05	3/2
61	Sean Mahan (G/C)	6-3/301	5/28/80	5	Notre Dame	FA/07	16/12
56	Chukky Okobi (C)	6-1/305	11/18/78	7	Purdue	D5/01	15/2
62	Marvin Philip (C)	6-1/307	2/3/82	1	California	D6/06	0/0
73	Kendall Simmons (G)	6-3/313	3/11/79	6	Auburn	D1/02	14/14
77	Marvel Smith (T)	6-5/321	8/6/78	8	Arizona State	D2/00	16/16
78	Max Starks (T)	6-8/337	1/10/82	4	Florida	D3/04	14/14
65	Cameron Stephenson (G)	6-4/305	6/18/83	R	Rutgers	D5a/07	—
71	Brandon Torrey (T)	6-4/295	5/18/83	1	Howard	FA/07	0/0
60	Greg Warren (LS)	6-3/252	10/18/81	3	North Carolina	FA/05	16/0
DEFENSIVE LINEMEN							
93	Nick Eason (E)	6-3/301	5/29/80	5	Clemson	FA/07	13/3
98	Casey Hampton (T)	6-1/325	9/3/77	7	Texas	D1/01	15/15
76	Chris Hoke (T)	6-2/305	4/6/76	7	Brigham Young	FA/02	16/1
99	Brett Keisel (E)	6-5/285	9/19/78	6	Brigham Young	D7b/02	16/16
90	Travis Kirschke (T)	6-3/298	9/6/74	11	UCLA	FA/04	16/0
69	Ryan McBean (E/T)	6-5/290	4/23/84	R	Oklahoma State	D4b/07	—
96	Shaun Nua (E)	6-5/280	5/22/81	3	Brigham Young	D7a/05	0/0
74	Scott Paxson (T)	6-4/292	2/3/83	2	Penn State	FA/06	0/0
91	Aaron Smith (E)	6-5/298	4/9/76	9	Northern Colorado	D4/99	16/16
LINEBACKERS							
49	Marcello Church	6-1/230	3/24/82	1	Florida State	FA/07	0/0
51	James Farrior	6-2/243	1/6/75	11	Virginia	FA/02	16/16
50	Larry Foote	6-1/239	6/12/80	6	Michigan	D4/02	16/16
53	Clark Haggans	6-4/243	1/10/77	8	Colorado State	D5a/00	15/15
92	Arnold Harrison	6-3/241	9/20/82	3	Georgia	FA/05	7/2
97	James Harrison	6-0/242	5/4/78	4	Kent State	FA/04	11/1
57	Clint Kriewaldt	6-1/248	3/16/76	9	Wis.-Stevens Point	FA/03	14/0
95	Richard Seigler	6-2/238	10/19/80	3	Oregon State	FA/06	2/0
47	Ronald Stanley	6-0/244	3/6/83	2	Michigan State	FA/06	1/0
94	Lawrence Timmons	6-1/234	5/14/86	R	Florida State	D1/07	—
54	Rian Wallace	6-3/241	5/24/82	3	Temple	D5/05	12/0
55	LaMarr Woodley	6-2/265	11/3/84	R	Michigan	D2/07	—
DEFENSIVE BACKS							
23	Tyrone Carter (S)	5-9/190	3/31/76	8	Minnesota	FA/04	16/3
25	Ryan Clark (S)	5-11/200	10/12/79	6	LSU	FA/06	13/12
21	Ricardo Colclough (CB)	5-11/195	4/18/82	4	Tusculum	D2/04	3/0
22	William Gay (CB)	5-10/190	1/1/85	R	Louisville	D5b/07	—
29	Chidi Iwuoma (CB)	5-9/184	2/19/78	7	California	FA/06	5/0
28	Jovon Johnson (CB)	5-9/177	11/2/83	2	Iowa	FA/06	2/0
45	Mike Lorello (S)	5-11/208	10/15/84	1	West Virginia	FA/06	0/0
37	Anthony Madison (CB)	5-9/180	10/8/81	2	Alabama	FA/06	13/0
20	Bryant McFadden (CB)	6-0/188	11/21/81	3	Florida State	D2/05	16/9
43	Troy Polamalu (S)	5-10/212	4/19/81	5	USC	D1/03	13/13
27	Anthony Smith (S)	6-0/192	9/20/83	2	Syracuse	D3a/06	16/4
30	Harrison Smith (CB)	6-2/199	2/28/83	1	California	FA/07	0/0
24	Ike Taylor (CB)	6-1/191	5/5/80	5	La.-Lafayette	D4/03	16/11
26	Deshaea Townsend (CB)	5-10/190	9/8/75	10	Alabama	D4a/98	16/12
SPECIALISTS							
17	Chris Gardocki (P)	6-1/192	2/7/70	17	Clemson	FA/04	16/0
3	Jeff Reed (K)	5-11/225	4/9/79	6	North Carolina	D4/02	16/0
9	Daniel Sepulveda (P)	6-3/230	1/12/84	R	Baylor	FA/07	—

Abbreviations: D1—draft pick, first round; W—claimed on waivers; T—obtained in trade; FA—free-agent acquisition.



# CHARGERS

AFC

**January wins, not regular-season success, will determine just how good this team really is**

**SN PICK** 1st, AFC West (14-2)

By KEVIN ACEE

**T**he best record in the 2006 regular season seems so far away, so insignificant. The Chargers went 14-2 and then promptly lost their first playoff game.

"It's not good enough," general manager A.J. Smith says. "We've got to figure out how to go to the postseason and win there. The first playoff game, that's all I'm looking for right now—how we do when we get there."

Yes, all the success and positive vibes of 2006 vanished in one January afternoon. The ensuing madness resulted in the loss of a head coach and both coordinators, the hiring of a coach who has posted a 54-70-1 career record and an offseason of inactivity in the free-agent market.

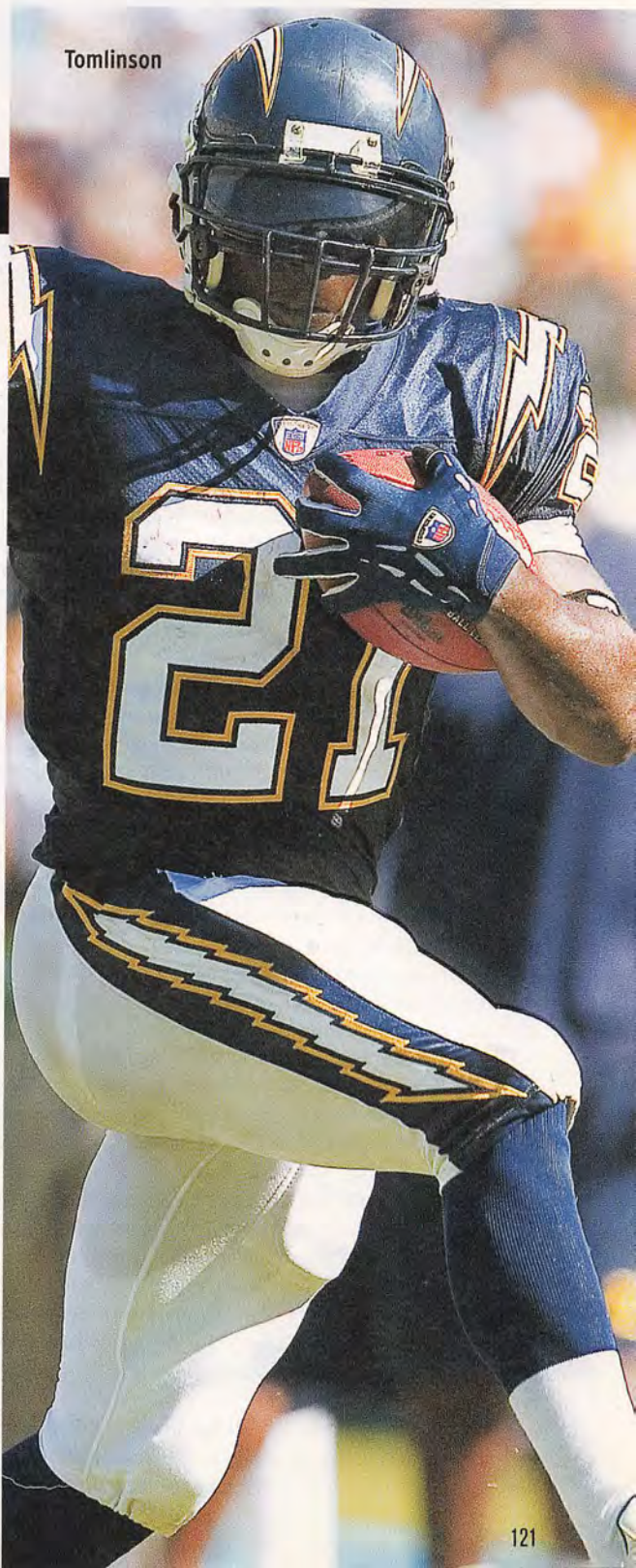
But the Chargers return 18 starters from a team that won 10 straight games to finish the regular season and lost by three points to New England in the playoffs because it made mistakes it hadn't made all year. Those starters include eight Pro Bowl invitees plus a Pro Bowl kicker, a Pro Bowl long snapper and a Pro Bowl special teams player.

## OFFENSE

The Chargers' new coordinator is Clarence Shelton, but their longtime running backs coach essentially will play facilitator for new coach Norv Turner. It was Turner who installed the team's offense as its coordinator in 2001—a major reason he was hired to replace Marty Schottenheimer. Turner also was mentor to former coordinator Cam Cameron, who departed to become coach of the Dolphins. Turner will continue educating quarterback Philip Rivers and tinkering with running back LaDainian Tomlinson and tight end Antonio Gates. Tomlinson's touchdown total most likely will decrease in 2007, but the balanced offense won't change much.

**Quarterbacks**—Rivers was better than anyone dared hope in his first season as a starter. Now the Chargers want to see him take another significant step. The primary goal is for him to become more consistent

Tomlinson



## SCHEDULE

All times Eastern

Sept. 9	CHICAGO	4:15
Sept. 16	at New England	8:15
Sept. 23	at Green Bay	1:00
Sept. 30	KANSAS CITY	4:15
Oct. 7	at Denver	4:15
Oct. 14	OAKLAND	4:15
Oct. 21	Open date	
Oct. 28	HOUSTON	4:05
Nov. 4	at Minnesota	1:00
Nov. 11	INDIANAPOLIS	8:15
Nov. 18	at Jacksonville	1:00
Nov. 25	BALTIMORE	4:15
Dec. 2	at Kansas City	1:00
Dec. 9	at Tennessee	1:00
Dec. 16	DETROIT	4:15
Dec. 24	DENVER*	8:00
Dec. 30	at Oakland	4:15

Strength of schedule: T-14th

\*Monday

Analysis of every Chargers game:  
sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom

## REGULAR-SEASON WINS



ROBERT SEALE / SN ARCHIVES



## FANTASY SOURCE PICKS

## STUD

TE Antonio Gates

## DRAFT-DAY BARGAIN

WR Vincent Jackson

## ON THE RISE

QB Philip Rivers

## BEST RED ZONE THREAT

RB LaDainian Tomlinson

## TOP IDP THREAT

LB Shawne Merriman



JOHN CORDES FOR SN

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in his decision making and accuracy.

For an offense that thrives on misdirection and quick hits, Rivers' ability to make quick reads and thread the ball in tight spaces is vital. His pocket awareness is uncanny for such a young player, and he makes plays other quarterbacks don't.

He also sees the field, recognizes coverages and adapts quickly, which is crucial for an offense that spreads the ball generously among Tomlinson, Gates and a solid cast of receivers. That keeps the skill players happy, and his toughness and team-first approach play well with a blue-collar line.

Billy Volek, who was acquired last September, lacks ideal arm strength but has poise, toughness and starting experience. It's comforting that he has had a year to learn the system. Charlie Whitehurst also will make a push for the No. 2 job. Whitehurst, a second-year player, is smart and a hard worker—and he might have the best arm among the three quarterbacks.

**GRADE: B+**

**Running backs**—Tomlinson's versatility propels the offense. The options he gives the team—handing him the ball, throwing to him, lining him up in the slot or using him as a passer—drive defenses crazy. Running behind an athletic line, Tomlinson is the center of an offense that is in constant motion and seldom gives the same look.

Once Tomlinson gets to the second level, he makes tacklers look silly with his moves, burst and occasional stiff-arm. Though he's plenty tough, the Chargers will look for ways to reduce the wear on their MVP back's relatively small frame, and they have the depth and talent to do so.

The drop-off is not precipitous when Michael Turner enters the game. Turner is a Clydesdale to Tomlinson's thoroughbred, a change of pace that gives defenses fits. He can run through tackles, but he's also deceptively fast, especially around the corner. Turner might even use an occasional two-back set, which would provide another challenge for defenses. Tiny Darren Sproles (5-6, 187) provides some quickness and big-play ability as the No. 3 back.

Pro Bowl fullback Lorenzo Neal, 36, now the oldest player on the roster, still relishes the challenge of reacting to shifting defenses and delivering his hole-opening blocks. **GRADE: A**

## SCOUTING REPORTS: OFFENSE

## ↑ Philip Rivers, QB

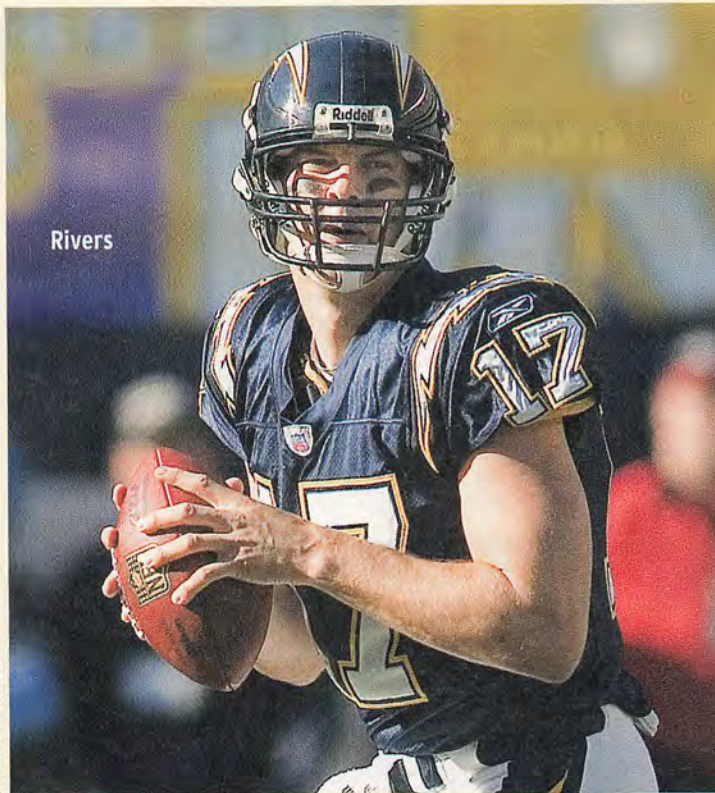
**Strengths:** Has a strong arm, quick feet and confidence in his ability. Has good touch and accuracy on short and intermediate throws. Good on the move. Tough and smart. Reads through progressions without forcing the ball.

**Weaknesses:** Has poor mechanics and an awkward throwing motion. Has marginal poise and sometimes runs before he has to.

## ↓ Lorenzo Neal, FB

**Strengths:** Tough and strong with good intangibles. Throws his shoulder into blocks, makes good contact and creates running lanes. Has good vision and gives an effort in space. Stays square in protection. A functional receiver on short throws.

**Weaknesses:** Stiff and slow. Drops his head on contact and gets held up in the hole. Loses contact after the initial hit.



Rivers

JOHN CORDES FOR SN

**Bottom line:** Rivers earned Pro Bowl honors in his first full season as a starter—and he can get much better. When his wide receivers develop, look out. **Grade: 8.0**

## LaDainian Tomlinson, RB

**Strengths:** Excels in all areas of the game. Explosive to the hole. Has vision, patience and toughness. Faster than most people give him credit for. Can run inside and outside. An outstanding receiver with soft hands. A front-up blocker who enjoys picking up the blitz.

**Weaknesses:** No sign of decline yet, but the excessive wear and tear on his body is reason for concern.

**Bottom line:** Tomlinson is football's most complete and talented running back. **Grade: 9.9**

Sometimes lunges and misses in space.

**Bottom line:** Neal, a solid locker room guy, is tough and still among the best at his position. **Grade: 6.8**

## ↑ Vincent Jackson, WR

**Strengths:** Has the physical potential to be a good perimeter and red zone target because of his size, bulk, speed and sure hands.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to improve his route-running and concentration lapses. Must work on flexibility, reads and recognition of coverages.

**Bottom line:** Jackson looks the part of a big-time receiver; now he must show he can fill that role. **Grade: 6.9**

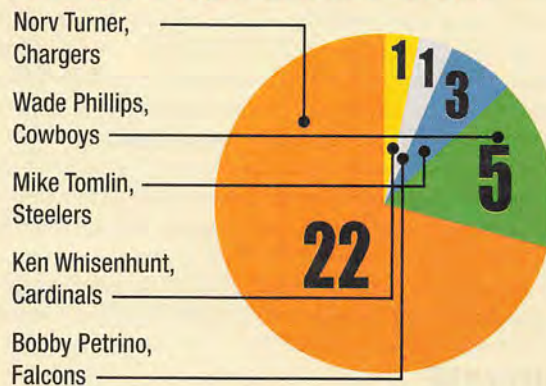
## Eric Parker, WR

**Strengths:** Gets in and out of cuts

Players are graded by War Room scouts on a 1-10 scale.  
\*Rookies (not graded)

## INSIDERS POLL

Which new coach has the best shot at winning the Super Bowl this season?



Based on a poll of SN's 32 team correspondents

## BOLD PREDICTIONS

- 1 With a year under the tutelage of Norv Turner, QB Philip Rivers will take another step toward elite status and finally make San Diego fans believe it was OK to let Drew Brees go.
- 2 RB LaDainian Tomlinson will score *only* 25 touchdowns and Antonio Gates will become the first tight end to be named league MVP after he scores 15 TDs.
- 3 With a healthy E Luis Castillo and improved LB Shaun Phillips to divert attention from him, LB Shawne Merriman will become the first Charger to surpass 20 sacks in a season.

**Receivers**—Gates is the Chargers' top receiving threat—and his presence is almost as important as Tomlinson's. Gates can't consistently be single-covered, and that opens up things for Tomlinson and the wide receivers. Gates is praised by teammates for his spectacular catches as well as his passion for making sure that balls thrown his way are not intercepted.

Vincent Jackson is poised to become the No. 1 wide receiver. He showed last season that he can make difficult and clutch catches, but he's not always dependable and sometimes has trouble getting open. Jackson and Malcolm Floyd are the team's best vertical options because of their speed and size.

Eric Parker is everything a possession receiver should be. He is tough and a precise route runner with good hands. In this quick-pass offense, he knows how to get open quickly. First-round pick Craig Davis provides another downfield threat and might instantly be the team's best run-after-the-catch guy.

The Chargers like to use two tight ends, and Brandon Manumaleuna is an excellent blocker who also can catch the ball when needed. **GRADE: B**

**Line**—Athleticism is key to this unit, which constantly is shifting, pulling and moving this way and that. Blocks 10 yards downfield are not uncommon.

Left guard Kris Dielman sets the tone with his nasty,

quickly. Has good burst and vertical speed; makes plays after the catch. Can make the acrobatic reception. Tough over the middle. Fields the ball well and has explosiveness as a punt returner.

**Weaknesses:** Has adequate height but lacks bulk. Can get jolted on his release. Wins few battles against defenders stuck to him. Limited as a blocker.

**Bottom line:** Parker had a strong 2006 season after winning the starting job, but he didn't emerge as a big-time playmaker. He must be more aggressive to the ball to take the next step. **Grade: 6.7**

### Antonio Gates, TE

**Strengths:** Has a near-perfect blend of height, size and speed. Smooth and fluid; has exceptional quickness off the line and in his routes. Can jab and change direction with little wasted motion. Has unusual instincts and is a load for linebackers and safeties one-on-one. Must be defended by a cornerback in passing situations. Has soft hands and can use finesse or power after the catch.

**Weaknesses:** Not a dominant blocker. Struggles when jammed off the line by bigger linebackers.

**Bottom line:** Gates is the best tight end in the NFL and can change the game anytime he touches the ball. **Grade: 9.8**

### ↑ Marcus McNeill, T

**Strengths:** Tall with a good frame and lower-body strength. An exceptional athlete with great speed for his size. Takes good angles; can overpower defenders. Has good knee bend in protection and seldom gets caught off-balance. Has long arms and adjusts well in the open field. Gets set quickly and forces defenders wide.

**Weaknesses:** Must improve footwork and technique; occasionally lunges. Must keep weight in check and maintain conditioning.

**Bottom line:** McNeill is a dominant run blocker and very athletic in protection. He'll be an anchor on the Chargers' line for years. **Grade: 7.5**

### Shane Olivea, T

**Strengths:** Tough, scrappy and strong. Has a good initial punch and can anchor in pass protection. A solid technician for a young player. Has

adequate foot quickness in a confined area. Not great in space but gives maximum effort on downfield blocks.

**Weaknesses:** Has short arms and stride. Allows defenders into his body and struggles reaching edge rushers. Has trouble adjusting once set and gives up the inside too easily.

**Bottom line:** Olivea is short for a starting tackle but plays with good leverage because of it. He's strong and can move defenders. **Grade: 6.8**

### Mike Goff, G

**Strengths:** Smart, tough and competitive. Gets good initial pop and creates movement in the running game. Understands blocking angles and has good initial quickness. Does well on double-teams and combination blocks. Anchors well in protection.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal athleticism. Has trouble against quick defensive tackles. Struggles in space and when protecting the edge.

**Bottom line:** Goff is a gutsy performer who makes up for his lack of athletic ability with great effort. **Grade: 7.3**

### ↑ Kris Dielman, G

**Strengths:** A tough, hard-nosed guy who plays to the whistle. Works his feet well and sustains blocks. Plays with leverage and drives his feet on contact.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks true foot quickness and is more of a mauler in the passing game.

**Bottom line:** Dielman brings toughness to the field and still has room to grow as a player. **Grade: 7.2**

### Nick Hardwick, C

**Strengths:** Quick, scrappy and smart. Sets up in a hurry and plays with a mean streak. Drops to the ground and tries to cut block when he thinks he is beat. A technician who knows how to use his hands and leverage. Has a feel for blocking schemes.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks strength and gets pushed aside too easily in basic blocking situations. Struggles against tackles lined up over his nose.

**Bottom line:** Hardwick is a solid starter who should get better with experience. **Grade: 7.0**

**KEY:** ↑ Ascending ↓ Descending

all-out play. He is so effective because he's mean and strong. Center Nick Hardwick (6-4, 295), a former wrestler, is undersized but as fiery and almost as strong as Dielman. Left tackle Marcus McNeill (6-8, 336) is a giant with a huge wingspan and stunning agility for his size.

Right guard Mike Goff is downright slow when compared to his younger, more athletic linemates, but he is smart and an outstanding pass protector with the ability to pull. Right tackle Shane Olivea is a load who does his job well because he is mean and a little crazy. He could someday move to guard.

The young line benefits from the wisdom of Roman Oben, who was the starter at left tackle before a serious foot injury wiped out the second half of his 2005 season and the first half of 2006. Teammates call him "The Chief."

Backup center Cory Withrow can slide over to guard if needed, and guard Scott Mrczkowski is highly regarded and also can play three positions. **GRADE: B+**

## DEFENSE

New coordinator Ted Cottrell is a disciple of former coordinator Wade Phillips, who left to become coach of the Cowboys. Cottrell was hired the same day as Turner and, like Turner, was brought in to maintain continuity. The Chargers' 3-4 scheme will stay the same, though there are concerns. Phillips did a great job of calling plays, and his aggressiveness always seemed to pay off. Cottrell is more conservative, though that could change with top pass rushers Shawne Merriman and Shaun Phillips at his disposal.

**Line**—Others get the glory, but the players acknowledge that the defense revolves around tackle Jamal Williams. The strongest man on the team might also be one of the fastest men in the world at his size (6-3, 348). He is almost always double-teamed, sometimes faces three blockers and still manages to divert or tackle the ballcarrier. His presence causes teams to run away from the middle, which pushes them into the arms of an outstanding end or linebacker.

Ends Luis Castillo and Igor Olshansky are young and hungry. Both have serious star potential and need only to put injuries behind them. Olshansky is a stout run-stopper who got quicker last offseason in an attempt to improve his pass rush. But he never was the same after a knee injury in the

## SECRET WEAPON

### VINCENT JACKSON, WR

He is hungry and knows this season will determine what his next contract looks like. Jackson is tall, strong and fast and already has made a handful of game-changing TD catches in one full season. If he becomes more consistent, Philip Rivers will look to him more. This offense with another weapon is a scary thought.



TODD WARSHAW FOR SD

## SCOUTING REPORTS: DEFENSE

### ↑ Luis Castillo, E

**Strengths:** A monster against the run. Comes off the ball low and with good leverage. Powerful and aggressive with his hands. Has a good lockout and can shed the defender with ease. Wins one-on-one battles. Must be double-teamed in the run game. Makes plays all over the field.

**Weaknesses:** Must improve pass-rush techniques; gives up his chest when trying to make a counter move.

**Bottom line:** Castillo is on the cusp of becoming a perennial Pro Bowl player. **Grade: 8.8**

### Igor Olshansky, E

**Strengths:** Tough, active and relentless. Uses upper-body strength to shed single blocks. An explosive hitter and finisher with more than adequate speed and range. Gets off the line quickly.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks counter moves and seldom wins battles once tied up. Plays hard, but his technique and understanding of positioning are raw. Lacks explosive quickness.

**Bottom line:** Olshansky is a strong, high-effort run defender, but he must improve as a pass rusher to take his game to the next level. **Grade: 6.9**

### Jamal Williams, T

**Strengths:** Has a nice blend of size, strength and athleticism. Plays with sound technique. Makes good use of his hands and strength to shed blockers into the backfield and hold up against double-teams. Closes quickly from the backside.

**Weaknesses:** Has an average motor. Tends to tire quickly and pick his spots. A straight-line pass rusher. Has lost a step off the ball.

**Bottom line:** Williams can be a dominant run defender and pocket crasher when fresh. He has improved his conditioning and regularly makes plays outside the tackles. **Grade: 8.8**

### ↑ Shaun Merriman, LB

**Strengths:** Has great size and strong hands; strong at the point of attack. Plays violently and is a ferocious tackler. Uses a variety of pass-rush moves off an explosive first step. Has great lateral quickness and good range to chase the ballcarrier from behind. Has outstanding speed and short-area burst. Will go for strips.

**Weaknesses:** Has stiffness in his hips and is not as fluid in coverage as he is running straight ahead.

**Bottom line:** Merriman clearly is the most dominant pass rusher in the game. **Grade: 9.1**

### ↑ Shaun Phillips, LB

**Strengths:** Smart, works hard and has good athleticism, quickness and speed. Smooth; changes direction well and closes with a strong burst. Can come off the edge and immediately pressure a tackle outside. Uses a variety of pass-rush moves.

**Weaknesses:** Raw and awkward in coverage. Must develop a better feel for blocking schemes. Loses containment too often.

**Bottom line:** Phillips has outstanding pass-rush ability but must improve in coverage and against the run. **Grade: 7.7**

### Matt Wilhelm, LB

**Strengths:** Tough and competitive; primarily a tackle-to-tackle player. Has good smarts and reads the quarterback well in coverage.

**Weaknesses:** Limited athletically and lacks great speed.

**Bottom line:** Wilhelm is versatile and a sure tackler in the running game, but it remains to be seen if he has the range and athleticism to survive in the Chargers' cover 2. **Grade: 6.5**

### Stephen Cooper, LB

**Strengths:** Versatile, athletic and good in space. Matches up well with backs and tight ends in zone or man coverage. A sure open-field tackler.

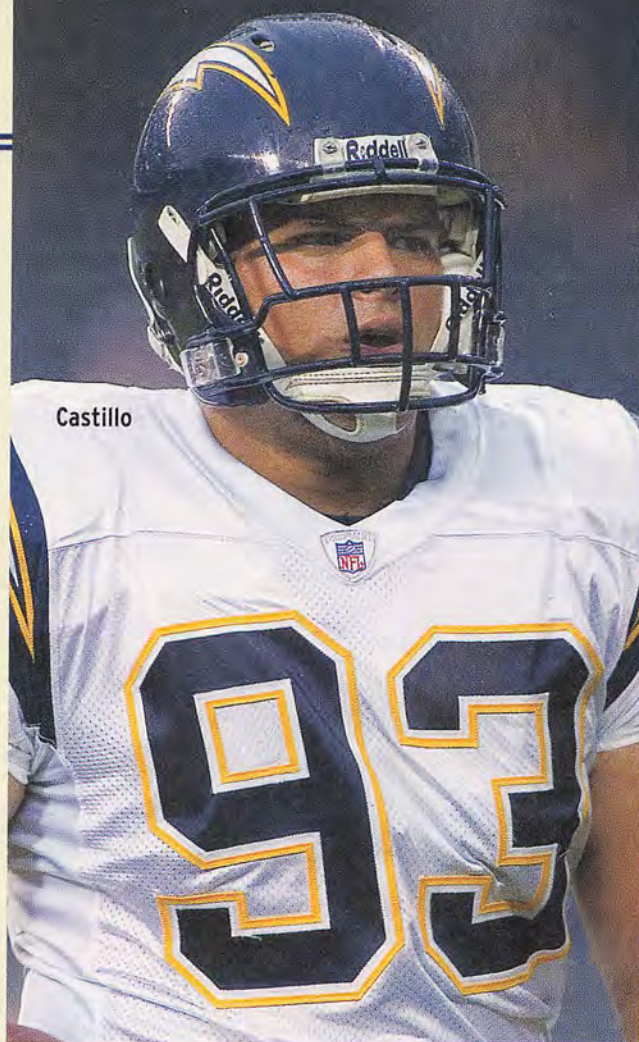
**Weaknesses:** Has average speed and range. Not physical; doesn't shed blocks well. Can be slow to read the run.

**Bottom line:** Cooper is at his best in space, which makes him a good fit in a defense that gives him the freedom to run to the ball and make plays. **Grade: 5.9**

### Quentin Jammer, CB

**Strengths:** Has good size and speed and relishes contact. Jams receivers at the line and runs with them downfield. Smooth and fluid; can maintain tight coverage and adjust well. Has the strength to work through pick plays. Tough against the run.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks elite burst and has inconsistent quickness in transition. Lets



Castillo

receivers get behind him in zone coverage. Gives up his share of catches. **Bottom line:** Jammer is a physically gifted player who isn't afraid to mix it up with receivers. He showed great improvement in 2006 and played at a consistently high level. **Grade: 7.8**

#### ↑ Antonio Cromartie, CB

**Strengths:** Has good speed and makes good use of his height, long arms and athleticism. Gets physical at the line and shows good footwork and fluid hip movement in man-to-man coverage. Has outstanding instincts. Out-jumps receivers and uses strong hands to challenge for passes. Contributes well in run support.

**Weaknesses:** Relies too much on pure talent; must improve his technique. Slow to recognize routes in zone coverage. Has durability concerns.

**Bottom line:** Cromartie has big-time physical tools and should develop into a playmaker. **Grade: 6.9**

#### Marlon McCree, S

**Strengths:** An aggressive hitter who is always around the ball. Has awareness and good speed; takes few false

steps. Has good recognition and ball skills. An effective run-support player who can break down and tackle ballcarriers in space.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks the bulk to match up well inside the box. Gets engulfed and lacks agility in coverage. Needs to do a better job of shedding blocks.

**Bottom line:** McCree, a big-play threat, can support the run and make plays against the pass. **Grade: 8.0**

#### \*Eric Weddle, S

**Strengths:** A versatile ballhawk who played well at cornerback and safety in college. Quick to react to passes; makes a play on the ball or keeps the receiver in front of him and makes a solid tackle. A tough, willing tackler. Smart; reads plays quickly.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks great size and the athleticism to play cornerback in the NFL. Will get abused in man-to-man coverage. Lacks elite speed.

**Bottom line:** Weddle doesn't look great but makes a game-changing play in every game. He will become a solid starter and make a surprising number of big plays. He also will make an impact on special teams.

## SCOUT TAKES

### A scout from another team sizes up the Chargers

**Philip Rivers** is extremely competitive, is going to do the little things to always improve and has high standards when it comes to winning and losing. But put under a lot of duress and pressure, he has not played at an elite level. Time will tell whether he reaches that level. ... From a defensive line standpoint, **Jamal Williams** has been the most feared guy in our division for our team over the last five years. He really disrupts a lot of stuff up front, even if he's not making plays. He's a beast.

... **Kris Dielman** is too young to have earned the distinction of an elite guard just yet, but he has the makings of it. He's a nasty player with good quickness and is very strong, especially in the upper body. ... I don't think they won last year because of coaching ingenuity. They won because they put together a great team. I think **Norv Turner** will be wise enough not to mess things up.



Williams

ROBERT SEALE / SN ARCHIVES

season opener. Castillo might have been on his way to the Pro Bowl when he suffered a high ankle sprain that sidelined him most of the final two months. He is big, quick and often dominant.

Jacques Cesaire is a well-paid backup who has started 16 games over the past two seasons in relief of Olshansky and Castillo. End Derreck Robinson is strong but lacks polish. Ryon Bingham has improved as a third-down fill-in for Williams, but he never will approach Williams' size or skill. **GRADE: B+**

**Linebackers**—Merriman led the league in sacks last season, and Phillips was second to Merriman among linebackers. The coaches line them up different ways to create confusion.

Merriman requires an extra man to guard him much of the time—a running back is useless—and he often draws a decoy as teams run away from him. Phillips does not draw as much attention from blockers, but that is changing. Phillips is a pass-rush specialist who has showed he can stop the run.

It's transition time inside. Matt Wilhelm takes over for Donnie Edwards and has a lot to live up to. Stephen Cooper, who has split time with Randall Godfrey for two years, takes over as the full-time guy. Wilhelm is at least as fast as Edwards and also 20 pounds heavier. He probably can make the tackles Edwards did, but he must make strides in coverage. Cooper, a hard hitter like Godfrey, has a knack for blitzing.

Carlos Polk filled in for Merriman last year and did well, despite limited speed. Tim Dobbins enters his second year in the league, and there is thought he will one day push Cooper. The Chargers think tenacious rookie Anthony Waters eventually will push those in front of him on the inside. Waters, a third-round pick, and Brandon Siler, a seventh-rounder, were drafted for depth and to help on special teams. **GRADE: A-**

**Secondary**—Quentin Jammer quieted his critics by becoming a shutdown corner last year. He did not allow big plays last season (except for a crucial one in the playoff loss), and he led

the team with four interceptions even though he has the worst hands in the secondary.

Opposite Jammer, Drayton Florence and Antonio Cromartie will battle for playing time. The team's two fastest players both deserve to start. Florence is more consistent, but Cromartie is young and talented. Both players work hard and flash the potential to become top-level corners.

Free safety Marlon McCree's arrival as a 2006 free agent played a big part in the secondary's improvement. He provides knowledge, leadership and above-average skills. McCree is a hard hitter who will be joined in the back by Bhawoh Jue, Clinton Hart or second-round pick Eric Weddle.

Jue was the starter at free safety in 2005 but missed most of last season with a knee injury. Hart deserves another shot at starting; he's excellent at finding the ball. Weddle will push both veterans for playing time—and could even be starting early in the season. Weddle is not big or fast, but he is a player. The Chargers have big plans for Weddle, which is why they gave up four picks to move up and grab him with the 37th overall selection. **GRADE: B-**

## SPECIAL TEAMS

The Chargers have a Pro Bowl snapper in David Binn and a Pro Bowl kicker Nate Kaeding, who is extremely accurate from inside 50 yards and has greatly increased his leg strength on kickoffs. Punter Mike Scifres didn't make the Pro Bowl, though his hang time and ability to place the ball inside the 10 are outstanding. The field position he provided last season was a big reason the Chargers' defense was so successful.

The best-case scenario is that Sproles will win both return jobs, which would save Turner and Parker from wear and tear. And Sproles has the potential to be spectacular. He had trouble fielding punts his rookie season, but he has worked diligently and found his comfort zone.

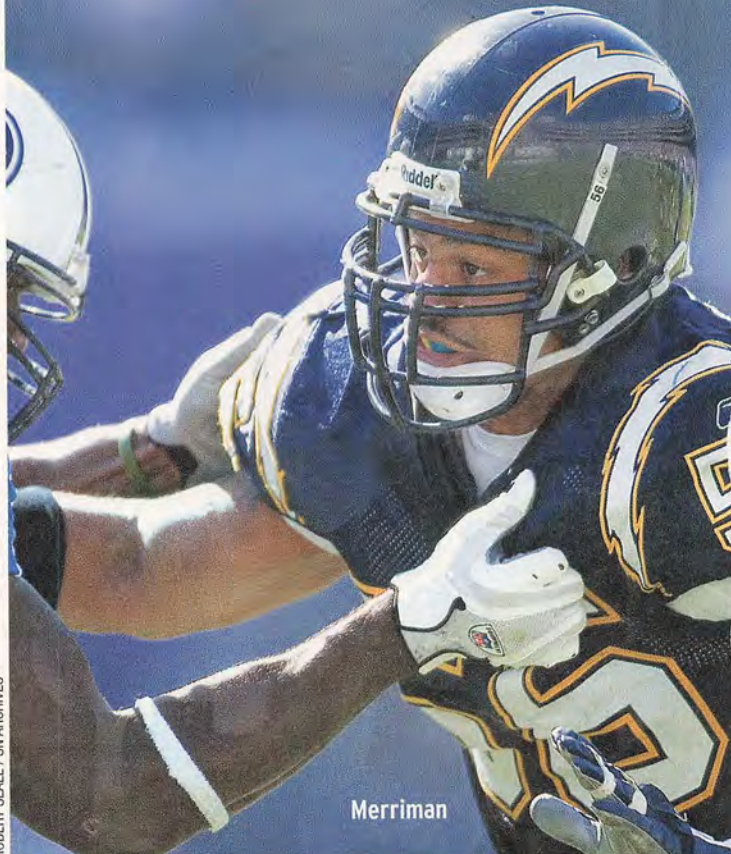
Special teams coordinator Steve Crosby consistently finds new ways to line up Pro Bowl special teamer Kassim Osgood, who often is double- and triple-teamed. Hart, Polk and Dobbins also are key coverage guys. **GRADE: B**

## BOTTOM LINE

The Chargers' record might not be as good as it was in 2006. Teams simply don't win 14 games very often. Plus, their schedule is tougher and they got some breaks last season. But it would take a major collapse for them to miss the playoffs.

They have some of the league's best players, plenty of depth and veteran leadership. Though the hiring of Turner did not seem inspired, the man can coach offense—and the new guys the Chargers brought in (Cottrell and linebackers coach Ron Rivera) are top-notch. Many are troubled by the Chargers' inactivity in the free-agent market, but this remains the most talented team in the AFC West and it will win at least 10 games. Maybe even a few more. The season, however, will be judged by what happens in January. **SN**

*Kevin Acee covers the Chargers for the San Diego Union-Tribune.*



ROBERT SEALE / SN ARCHIVES

Merriman

## KEY MOVES

### 2007 DRAFT PICKS

Rd.-Pick

**GRADE B**

**1-30 Craig Davis, WR, LSU**

Has speed and great hands and runs sharp routes. Also could return punts.

**2-37 Eric Weddle, S, Utah**

A smart and versatile player who can handle either safety spot.

**3-96 Anthony Waters, LB, Clemson**

A nasty, hard hitter who will play primarily on special teams.

**4-129 Scott Chandler, TE, Iowa**

Will be given time to add strength and learn the system. A project.

**5-172 Legedu Naanee, WR, Boise State**

A good practice squad project if he doesn't make the team.

**7-240 Brandon Siler, LB, Florida**

A project who needs time to develop more lateral quickness and agility.

## VETERAN PLAYERS

**Additions:** None

**Losses:** LB Donnie Edwards (FA/Chiefs), LB Steve Foley (FA), S Terrence Kiel (FA), TE Ryan Krause (FA/Browns), WR Keenan McCardell (FA), TE Aaron Shea (FA).

### STADIUM/MEDIA

Qualcomm Stadium (70,000, grass)

Tickets: 877-CHARGERS

Training camp: Chargers Park, San Diego; 858-874-4500

Radio: KIOZ 105.3 FM

Website: chargers.com

## PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
QB ▲ Philip Rivers	● Billy Volek	LE ▲ Luis Castillo	● Derreck Robinson
FB ▲ Lorenzo Neal	□ Andrew Pinnock	DT ▲ Jamal Williams	□ Ryon Bingham
RB ▲ LaDainian Tomlinson	● Michael Turner	RE ▲ Igor Olshansky	● Jacques Cesaire
WR ● Eric Parker	● Craig Davis	OLB ▲ Shawne Merriman	● Carlos Polk
WR ● Vincent Jackson	● Malcom Floyd	ILB ● Matt Wilhelm	● Anthony Waters
TE ▲ Antonio Gates	● B. Manumaleuna	ILB ● Stephen Cooper	● Tim Dobbins
LT ● Marcus McNeill	● Roman Oben	OLB ▲ Shaun Phillips	● Marques Harris
LG ▲ Kris Dielman	● Scott Mruzckowski	LCB ● Quentin Jammer	□ Cletis Gordon
C ▲ Nick Hardwick	□ Cory Withrow	SS ● Eric Weddle	● Bhawoh Jue
RG ● Mike Goff	● Scott Mruzckowski	FS ● Marlon McCree	● Clinton Hart
RT ● Shane Olivea	□ Cory Lekkerkerker	RCB ● Antonio Cromartie	● Drayton Florence

### SPECIALISTS

K ▲ Nate Kaeding	KR ● Darren Sproles
P ▲ Mike Scifres	PR ● Darren Sproles
	LS ● David Binn

▲ Elite ■ Solid

● Adequate □ Fringe

Depth charts updated weekly at [sportingnews.com](http://sportingnews.com)

Jammer

## CHARGERS ROSTER

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL exp.	College	How acq.	2006 GP/GS
QUARTERBACKS							
17	Philip Rivers	6-5/228	12/8/81	4	N.C. State	D1/04	16/16
7	Billy Volek	6-2/214	4/28/76	8	Fresno State	T-Ten/06	1/0
6	Charlie Whitehurst	6-4/223	8/6/82	2	Clemson	D3/06	2/0
RUNNING BACKS							
41	Lorenzo Neal (FB)	5-11/255	12/27/70	15	Fresno State	FA/03	16/11
34	Andrew Pinnock (FB)	5-10/250	3/12/80	5	South Carolina	D7/03	3/0
43	Darren Sproles	5-6/187	6/20/83	3	Kansas State	D4/05	0/0
21	LaDainian Tomlinson	5-10/221	6/23/79	7	TCU	D1/01	16/16
33	Michael Turner	5-10/237	2/13/82	4	Northern Illinois	D5b/04	13/0
RECEIVERS							
82	Greg Camarillo	6-1/190	4/18/82	3	Stanford	FA/05	4/0
87	Scott Chandler (TE)	6-7/265	7/23/85	R	Iowa	D4/07	—
84	Craig Davis	6-1/207	10/2/85	R	LSU	D1/07	—
80	Malcom Floyd	6-5/225	9/8/81	4	Wyoming	FA/04	12/0
85	Antonio Gates (TE)	6-4/260	6/18/80	5	Kent State	FA/03	16/16
83	Vincent Jackson	6-5/238	1/14/83	3	Northern Colorado	D2/05	16/7
86	B. Manumaleuna (TE)	6-2/288	1/4/80	7	Arizona	T-SL/06	16/7
89	Legedu Naanee	6-2/226	9/16/83	R	Boise State	D5/07	—
81	Kassim Osgood	6-5/220	5/20/80	5	San Diego State	FA/03	16/0
88	Eric Parker	6-0/180	4/14/79	6	Tennessee	FA/02	15/12
OFFENSIVE LINEMEN							
50	David Binn (LS)	6-3/223	2/6/72	14	California	FA/94	16/0
66	Jeromey Clary (T)	6-6/306	11/5/83	2	Kansas State	FA/07	0/0
68	Kris Dielman (G)	6-4/310	2/3/81	5	Indiana	FA/03	15/15
79	Mike Goff (G)	6-5/311	1/6/76	10	Iowa	FA/04	16/16
61	Nick Hardwick (C)	6-4/295	9/2/81	4	Purdue	D3/04	16/16
71	Cory Lekkerkerker (T)	6-7/324	7/25/81	3	Cal-Davis	FA/05	15/0
73	Marcus McNeill (T)	6-8/336	11/16/83	2	Auburn	D2/06	16/16
63	Scott Mruzckowski (C/G)	6-5/318	4/5/82	3	Bowling Green	D7/05	7/1
72	Roman Oben (T)	6-4/305	10/9/72	12	Louisville	T-TB/04	2/0
70	Shane Olivea (T)	6-4/312	10/7/81	4	Ohio State	D7b/04	16/16
65	Cory Withrow (C/G)	6-2/287	4/5/75	8	Washington State	FA/06	11/0
DEFENSIVE LINEMEN							
97	Ryon Bingham (T)	6-3/303	6/6/81	4	Nebraska	D7a/04	16/0
93	Luis Castillo (E)	6-3/290	8/4/83	3	Northwestern	D1b/05	10/9
74	Jacques Cesaire (E)	6-2/295	8/30/80	5	Southern Conn. St.	FA/03	16/10
91	Brandon McKinney (T)	6-2/324	8/24/83	2	Michigan State	FA/06	6/0
99	Igor Olshansky (E)	6-6/309	5/3/82	4	Oregon	D2/04	13/13
98	Derreck Robinson (E)	6-4/287	3/3/82	3	Iowa	FA/06	14/0
76	Jamal Williams (T)	6-3/348	4/28/76	10	Oklahoma State	*SD-2/98	16/16
LINEBACKERS							
54	Stephen Cooper	6-1/235	6/19/79	5	Maine	FA/03	16/4
51	Tim Dobbins	6-1/246	12/10/82	2	Iowa State	D5/06	16/0
92	Marques Harris	6-1/231	9/20/81	3	Southern Utah St.	FA/06	15/1
40	Kurt Kahi	6-1/240	10/18/84	1	San Diego State	FA/07	0/0
56	Shawne Merriman	6-4/272	5/25/84	3	Maryland	D1a/05	12/12
95	Shaun Phillips	6-3/262	5/13/81	4	Purdue	D4/04	14/14
52	Carlos Polk	6-2/262	2/22/77	7	Nebraska	D4/01	16/4
59	Brandon Siler	6-2/239	12/5/85	R	Florida	D7/07	—
53	Anthony Waters	6-3/238	7/25/84	R	Clemson	D3/07	—
57	Matt Wilhelm	6-4/245	2/2/81	5	Ohio State	D4/03	16/0
DEFENSIVE BACKS							
25	Antonio Cromartie (CB)	6-3/208	4/15/84	2	Florida State	D1/06	16/0
29	Drayton Florence (CB)	6-0/195	12/19/80	5	Tuskegee	D2a/03	16/16
38	Gabe Franklin (CB)	5-10/185	6/28/82	1	Boise State	FA/07	0/0
24	Cletis Gordon (CB)	6-1/197	7/17/82	2	Kansas State	FA/06	2/0
28	Steve Gregory (CB)	5-11/185	1/8/83	2	Syracuse	FA/06	14/0
42	Clinton Hart (S)	6-0/205	7/20/77	5	Central Florida CC	W-Phi/04	16/1
23	Quentin Jammer (CB)	6-0/204	6/19/79	6	Texas	D1/02	16/16
27	Bhawoh Jue (S)	6-0/199	5/24/79	7	Penn State	FA/05	12/2
20	Marlon McCree (S)	5-11/202	3/17/77	7	Kentucky	FA/06	14/14
32	Eric Weddle (S)	5-11/200	1/4/85	R	Utah	D2/07	—
SPECIALISTS							
10	Nate Kaeding (K)	6-0/187	3/26/82	4	Iowa	D3a/04	16/0
5	Mike Scifres (P/K)	6-2/236	10/8/80	5	Western Illinois	D5/03	16/0

Abbreviations: D1-draft pick, first round; W-claimed on waivers; T-obtained in trade; FA-free-agent acquisition. \*SD-Supplemental Draft



TENNESSEE

AFC

# TITANS

The team has a lot to overcome, but with Vince Young under center, there's hope

**SN PICK** 3rd, AFC South (7-9)

By JIM WYATT

With a rookie quarterback leading the way, the Titans climbed back to respectability a lot faster than most people thought they would.

They started last season 0-5 before Vince Young put on his Superman cape and guided the team to an 8-8 record, which included a stretch of six straight wins. Young was named NFL rookie of the year, and the Titans finished one win short of the playoffs. Now their challenge will be to take the next step—and they'll have to do it with less firepower than they had last season.

The plan going into the offseason was to surround Young with more talent on offense—or at least that's what everyone thought. Then the Titans lost their top running back and their top two receivers, and they chose not to get into a bidding war for the top free agents on the market. Instead, the Titans went after younger, more affordable players. They hope the additions will allow the team to keep rolling on the momentum it built in the second half of last season, but it will be an uphill battle.

## OFFENSE

Last season, coordinator Norm Chow built game plans that took advantage of Young's strengths and a solid running game. As a result, there wasn't much pressure on Young to win games by himself. With running back Travis Henry gone, though, Young will have to do more. He demonstrated in the offseason that he has a much better grasp of the offense, and the Titans will certainly need more from him.

**Quarterbacks**—Young won games—in dramatic fashion—with his arm and legs last season. But he is far from a finished product, especially as a passer: His .515 completion percentage was the NFL's worst. His decision making improved as the season went on, though, and the Titans believe he'll be even better this year. He worked on his footwork this offseason, which could help, but Chow also wants to see his accuracy improve.

Coaches think veteran backup Kerry Collins, who started the first three

## SCHEDULE

All times Eastern

Sept. 9	at Jacksonville	1:00
Sept. 16	INDIANAPOLIS	1:00
Sept. 24	at New Orleans*	8:30
Sept. 30	Open date	
Oct. 7	ATLANTA	1:00
Oct. 14	at Tampa Bay	1:00
Oct. 21	at Houston	1:00
Oct. 28	OAKLAND	1:00
Nov. 4	CAROLINA	1:00
Nov. 11	JACKSONVILLE	1:00
Nov. 19	at Denver*	8:30
Nov. 25	at Cincinnati	1:00
Dec. 2	HOUSTON	1:00
Dec. 9	SAN DIEGO	1:00
Dec. 16	at Kansas City	1:00
Dec. 23	N.Y. JETS	4:15
Dec. 30	at INDIANAPOLIS	1:00

Strength of schedule: 4th

\*Monday

Analysis of every Titans game:  
sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom

## REGULAR-SEASON WINS



Young



ALBERT DICKSON / SN

games of 2006, is capable of playing well if the team needs him, but his most important job for now will be continuing to mentor Young. Collins still has a strong arm, but his lack of mobility is a problem. He struggled with his decision-making last year but now is much more comfortable in Chow's offense. **GRADE: B**

**Running backs**—Henry was a workhorse, but the Titans released him because of salary cap concerns. The move was not well-received by the offensive linemen. Now, LenDale White is on the spot, and that's a concern because he played sparingly in his rookie season, partly because of nagging injuries. The Titans haven't been impressed with his work ethic, and when he showed up at the offseason program overweight, it sent up even more red flags.

Still, the Titans are confident White—a sturdy back with quick feet and a burst in the hole—will be productive. Behind him will be Chris Henry, a second-round pick who will compete for playing time. Henry has good size and speed and has shown he can get the tough yards up the middle. But he is raw and has never produced for a full season. Quinton Ganther has a chance to be the No. 3 back. He is a strong runner, but he's not exceptionally fast or shifty.

At fullback, the Titans have a weapon in Ahmard Hall, who is a solid blocker and receiver. The Titans want to get him even more involved this season. **GRADE: D+**

**Receivers**—Someone needs to step up and provide a target for Young. Drew Bennett and Bobby Wade, who left as free agents, had 79 receptions between them last season and the rest of the receivers had 45. Plus, veteran David Givens is recovering from knee surgery and his availability for the start of the season is in question.

That leaves third-year player Brandon Jones, who has been plagued by injuries and inconsistency, as the No. 1 receiver. Jones has shown flashes of brilliance, and he and Young have

## SCOUT TAKES

### A scout from another team sizes up the Titans

**Vince Young** is going to improve, but they have to give him some help. Last year, he didn't do a lot of damage with his arm; it was mostly with his running ability. ... I don't know if **Chris Henry** is the answer, but they definitely needed a running back. ... **Brandon Jones** is a good second wide receiver, but I think they need a big-play guy. ... If his head's on straight, **Albert Haynesworth** can still disrupt people. When he's on his game, he can be a playmaker inside. ... The off-field issues aside, they're really going to miss **Pacman Jones**. I don't want to say he had a breakout year, but he was consistent on defense. You saw glimpses that made him a top draft pick—and I'm not even talking about his return game.

ALBERT DICKSON / SN



Jones



developed chemistry. Behind Jones, the Titans have several unproven players, beginning with Courtney Roby and Roydell Williams, who have good speed but lack experience. The team signed Justin Gage (6-4, 210), who will bring a physical presence and give Young a big target over the middle.

The Titans nabbed three receivers in the draft—Paul Williams, Chris Davis and Joel Filani. Davis has the best chance to make an immediate impact. He's the most polished, and if he performs like the coaches think he can, he could emerge as the No. 3 at some point.

The Titans have a pair of athletic tight ends in Ben Troupe and Bo Scaife, both of whom are capable of picking up yards after the catch. Ben Hartsock is a good blocker. **GRADE: D+**

**Line**—A young line with a veteran anchor in the middle came together last season, and it provides plenty of reason for optimism. The Titans are set at tackle with Michael Roos on the left and David Stewart on the right. Roos is more athletic than Stewart and has the feet and hands to keep ends away from Young. Stewart is more of a mauler, and he has a mean streak. Both excelled in the running game and in pass protection last season.

Center Kevin Mawae proved in his first season as a Titan—and his 13th overall—that he's still capable of playing at a high level. He moves well in the running game and is a stabilizing force for Young and the rest of the line. At guard, the physical Benji Olson and the athletic Jacob Bell do a good job of opening holes and protecting Young.

Eugene Amano is a proven backup inside, and fourth-round pick Leroy Harris will be in the interior mix, too. Both players have good strength, hands and footwork, though Harris needs to work on his technique. Guard Justin Geisinger has good size and can play guard or center. The team is counting on Seth Wand to be the primary backup at tackle. He is a former starting left tackle with the Texans, but he has struggled with pass blocking. Rookie Mike Otto could be the fourth guy. **GRADE: B**

## DEFENSE

The Titans once had a reputation for being one of the league's best at defending the run. They've fallen off that perch

## FANTASY SOURCE PICKS

**SLEEPER**  
WR Brandon Jones

**RISK/REWARD**  
QB Vince Young

**COMEBACK CANDIDATE**  
TE Ben Troupe

**INJURY RISK**  
RB LenDale White

**TOP NEWCOMER**  
RB Chris Henry



MATTHEW KUTZ / SN ARCHIVES

Fantasy Source Football is your online fantasy authority.  
Go to [fantasy.sportingnews.com/nfl](http://fantasy.sportingnews.com/nfl).

## SCOUTING REPORTS: OFFENSE

### ↑Vince Young, QB

**Strengths:** A remarkable athlete with outstanding speed and mobility. Big, strong and built like a rock. Can make all the throws and push the ball downfield. Has good zip on his passes, with accuracy and timing. Has tremendous vision as an open-field runner. Has quick feet in the pocket and excels at avoiding the rush. Can turn broken plays into big gains.

**Weaknesses:** Has improved as a passer but remains raw. Must develop better mechanics. Needs to make better decisions. Must be more patient and give receivers time to get open. Sometimes tries to do too much.

**Bottom line:** Young is tough, fearless and cool under pressure. He still must develop as a passer and decision maker, but he's sure to be an NFL star for years to come. **Grade: 7.9**

### ↑LenDale White, RB

**Strengths:** Has outstanding size and lower-body strength. A physical runner who can bull over defenders. Good in short-yardage situations. Sees the field well and is patient. Has vision, body control and the burst to bounce runs outside at the second level.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks breakaway speed and is not elusive. Must improve in pass protection and do a better job of picking up the blitz. His conditioning, durability and character have all come into question at one time or another. **Bottom line:** With a little maturity and hard work, White will be a solid NFL starter. Indications are he's headed in that direction. **Grade: 7.0**

### David Givens, WR

**Strengths:** A powerful player with outstanding strength in his hands. Has superb body control and concentration. Can catch the ball high and low and outside his frame. Has good short burst to create separation. Good with his hands to escape jams. Has deceptive deep speed. A good blocker.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks elite deep speed and initial quickness. Won't run away from defenders and is best suited to finding space underneath. Coming off a serious knee injury.

**Bottom line:** With the loss of Drew Bennett, Givens is the Titans' only perimeter receiving threat. He has not recovered quickly from a knee injury and may not be ready for the start of the season. **Grade: 7.5**

### Brandon Jones, WR

**Strengths:** Strong, with good speed, hands and toughness. Has good vision and will look the ball in. Can break tackles after the catch.

**Weaknesses:** Average route runner with injury concerns. Not a consistent blocker.

**Bottom line:** Jones, who has been slow to develop, will be forced into a starting role this year. He must step up and be productive. **Grade: 6.0**

### Roydell Williams, WR

**Strengths:** Has good body control and balance. Uses his body well to shield defenders from the ball. Has good hands and will look the ball in.

**Weaknesses:** Not explosive off the line or in his routes. Lacks awareness of coverages and needs to improve his route running.

**Bottom line:** Williams has flashed enough playmaking ability to warrant a solid look from the Titans. He's a hard worker who must improve his lower-body strength. **Grade: 6.0**

### ↓Ben Troupe, TE

**Strengths:** Has good height and athletic ability. A big target with good hands and a wide wingspan that allows him to make spectacular adjustments outside his frame.

Has the speed and savvy to stretch the middle of the field.

**Weaknesses:** Gets thrown around by power ends on running plays. Needs lower-body strength.

**Bottom line:** Troupe has all the tools to be a top-tier tight end, but he struggles with the mental part of the game and injuries. **Grade: 6.6**

### ↑Michael Roos, T

**Strengths:** A good athlete for a tall player. Has flexibility and bends knees. Good on reach and cut-off blocks because he has lateral quickness. Uses his long arms well in protection. Has good mirror-and-slide ability.

**Weaknesses:** Does not always play with proper technique and will lunge to make blocks. Lacks a



BOB LEVERONE / SN



Players are graded by War Room scouts on a 1-10 scale.

\*Rookies (not graded)

true anchor and is susceptible to bull rushes if he loses leverage off the snap.

**Bottom line:** Roos has become a solid starter, and his stock will continue to rise after a solid offseason and improved strength and weight gain.

**Grade: 7.4**

### David Stewart, T

**Strengths:** A good combination of strength, intelligence, intensity and toughness. A mauling run blocker; always finishes his blocks. A capable pass protector.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks lateral quickness and is late out of his stance. Crosses over his feet and gets off-balance. Will get high and expose his chest, which causes him to get pushed back

into the pocket.

**Bottom line:** Stewart is strong, smart and tough. He lacks some elite physical skills, but he's a capable starter.

**Grade: 6.3**

### Benji Olson, G

**Strengths:** Tough, durable and dependable. A physical, mauling blocker with good size. Works hard to keep his feet moving and finish when engaged. A load at the point of contact when he connects on short pulls.

**Weaknesses:** Inconsistent pulling right or left. Has trouble against double moves inside and lacks recovery quickness.

**Bottom line:** Olson doesn't have great technique, but he plays with a toughness and a mean streak that helps him win in most one-on-one situations.

**Grade: 6.9**

### Jacob Bell, G

**Strengths:** A good overall athlete with initial quickness out of his stance. Effective pulling right or left. Has good vision and adjusts well to moving line-backers. Effective on reach blocks.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to get stronger.

Doesn't play with consistent leverage. Not real physical or aggressive.

**Bottom line:** He has shown improvement and is versatile enough to play guard or tackle.

**Grade: 6.3**

### Kevin Mawae, C

**Strengths:** Plays with a wide base, stays balanced and works hard to sustain blocks.

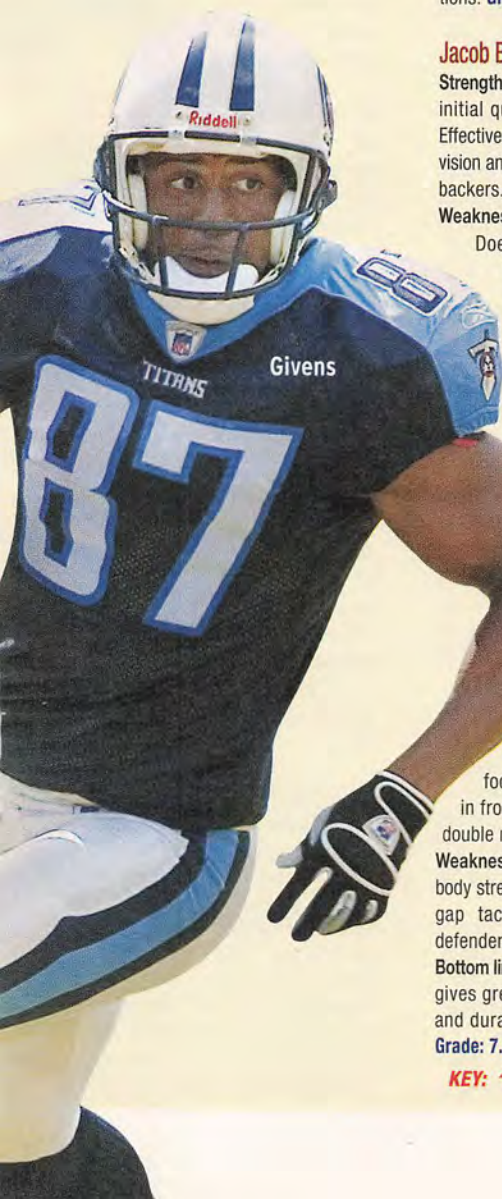
Has the lateral mobility to adjust to moving targets at the second level. Has good footwork; keeps the defender in front and seldom gets beat by double moves.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks bulk and lower-body strength; struggles against two-gap tackles. Won't knock many defenders off the ball.

**Bottom line:** Mawae is athletic, always gives great effort and is smart. Age and durability are future concerns.

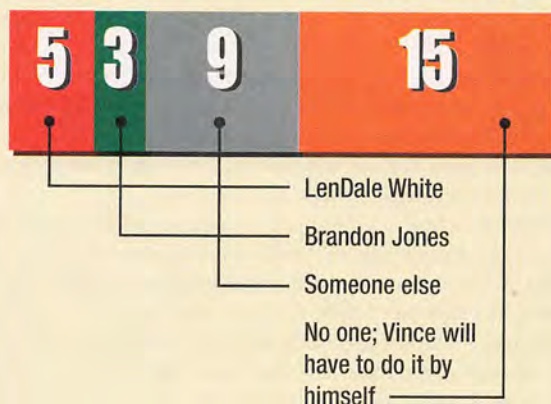
**Grade: 7.0**

**KEY:** ↑ Ascending ↓ Descending



## INSIDERS POLL

Which skill position player will step up and take the pressure off Vince Young?



Based on a poll of SN's 32 team correspondents

## BOLD PREDICTIONS

- 1 QB Vince Young won't match the 552 rushing yards he had last season, but his completion percentage will improve.
- 2 RB LenDale White will post at least three 100-yard games, but he'll also be forced to sit out a handful of contests because of nagging injuries.
- 3 After his numbers dipped last season, DE Kyle Vanden Bosch will have double-digit sacks again, in part because the other end, Travis LaBoy, will have his most productive season.

in recent years, and the top priority this season is to shore up that area. Coordinator Jim Schwartz would like to attack more this season and put more pressure on opposing quarterbacks, but he'll need another end to emerge before the Titans can do that. Schwartz has some experienced players, so the more aggressive plan seems reasonable.

**Line—**Kyle Vanden Bosch's sacks total dipped from 12½ in 2005 to 6½ in '06, though he was playing with his usual high level of intensity. The problem last season was that there wasn't a consistent pass rusher on the opposite side to take the pressure off Vanden Bosch, which led to more attention from opponents in the form of double-teams and chips.

The Titans need Travis LaBoy and Antwan Odom to step up; injuries and inconsistencies have kept them from reaching their potential. Both are better against the pass than the run, but they haven't been productive at either. Jacob Ford, a sixth-round pick, could provide a boost at end. Ford has good speed and athletic ability, but he's raw and unproven.

In a suspension-shortened season last year, tackle Albert Haynesworth didn't make the impact the Titans thought he would. But if the team generates more pressure from the outside, it will create more opportunities for Haynesworth to rush the passer inside. Randy Starks has been inconsistent, but he played better last season and has improved at recognizing plays



and reacting.

The team missed Rien Long (Achilles') last season because he has a knack for getting to the quarterback. Tony Brown provides depth; he can fill in at end or tackle. Rookie Antonio Johnson is a late bloomer who likely will work his way into the rotation at tackle. He's regarded as a better run stuffer than pass rusher. **GRADE: B**

**Linebackers**—The Titans have speed on the outside with Keith Bulluck and David Thornton. And during the offseason, they added some brawn with Ryan Fowler. He will compete against Stephen Tulloch, who started three games last season, for the middle linebacker job.

The Titans have used Bulluck to rush the passer and cover running backs and tight ends in the passing game—and they've relied on him to run down ballcarriers sideline to sideline. This season, the team needs him to create more turnovers and big plays. Like Bulluck, Thornton is capable of doing many things. He was highly productive in his first year with the team, and the Titans want even more from him this season. Look for his blitzing opportunities to increase.

Fowler is making the switch to the 4-3 scheme after serving as a backup in the Cowboys' 3-4. The Titans believe Fowler has the strength to help the inside run defense and that he could free up Bulluck and Thornton to make plays. Tulloch is a physical player and a good tackler, but he sometimes gets caught out of position.

Robert Reynolds likely will continue to play a key role in situational packages, and he will provide help on special teams. Also providing depth is LeVar Woods. He is experienced and a sound tackler but lacks range. **GRADE: B+**

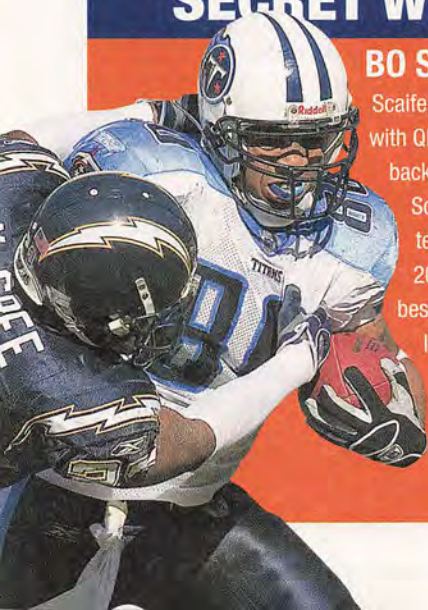
**Secondary**—Because of the uncertainty surrounding Pacman Jones' future, the Titans signed Nick Harper to provide insurance and/or help in the secondary. And now that Jones has been suspended for the season, Harper will have a big role. Despite the fact he played mostly in zone schemes at Indianapolis, he fits well in the team's plans. Harper is physical against the run and is capable of blitzing. He plays the ball well in the air, and his commitment and leadership will be valuable. Third-year corner Reynaldo Hill is best in man-to-man coverage, which he likely will get to play more of this season. Hill's long arms and speed make him effective on the outside.

## SECRET WEAPON

### BO SCAIFE, TE

Scaife has great chemistry with QB Vince Young that dates back to their days at Texas.

Scaife was third on the team in receptions in 2006 and is primed for his best season yet. He is athletic, a solid receiver and one of the team's best at breaking tackles. He's also a calming influence on Young.



ROBERT SEALE / SN ARCHIVES

## SCOUTING REPORTS: DEFENSE

### Kyle Vanden Bosch, E

**Strengths:** A high-motor player who shows good leverage off the snap. Comes off hard and low. Uses a lot of different pass-rush moves. Never stops driving his legs and gets sacks on pure hustle. A good tackler with strong wrap-up ability. A smart player with natural toughness.

**Weaknesses:** Can be engulfed and washed down the line when he loses leverage. Has a history of injuries.

**Bottom line:** Vanden Bosch is the team's best pass rusher. He will continue to face constant double-teams until another pass rusher emerges. **Grade: 7.7**

### Travis LaBoy, E

**Strengths:** Makes plays with second effort. Chases the ball all over the field. Has a solid first step as a pass rusher and an excellent closing burst.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks size and strength. Can get engulfed by blockers. Will get spun around and out of position.

**Bottom line:** LaBoy has showed some pass-rush ability but needs to stay healthy and work on his strength to continue development. **Grade: 6.5**

### Randy Starks, T

**Strengths:** Versatile, with a nice combination of size, athleticism and strength. Explosive and comes off the ball low and hard. Has good lower-body strength at the point of attack. Good at shedding blocks inside.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to improve stamina and use his hands better to protect his lower legs. Sometimes will spin off blocks and get out of position.

**Bottom line:** Starks has the ability to take over a game when he's fresh, but he has been disappointing overall. He must show better commitment to reach the next level. **Grade: 7.7**

### ↓ Albert Haynesworth, T

**Strengths:** Has size, athleticism, quickness and strength. Can penetrate and disrupt. Naturally strong and can put the center on his heels. Has the pass-rush quickness to get to the edges.

**Weaknesses:** Inconsistent in every phase of the game. Needs to improve his offseason conditioning. Doesn't finish with consistency. Seldom makes big plays.

**Bottom line:** This is a make-or-break year for Haynesworth, who needs to

decide whether he wants to be a dominant player or just a big body who takes up space. **Grade: 7.5**

### Keith Bulluck, LB

**Strengths:** Big, tall and rangy with exceptional speed and athleticism. Makes plays all over the field. An excellent pass rusher who is smooth and fluid in coverage. Has long arms and can get into the passing lanes. Aggressive against the inside run. Plays with a nasty streak and hits with explosive power.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks great instincts. His game suffers when he's tired because it negates his ability to use his speed in pursuit.

**Bottom line:** Bulluck, the best all-around player on the Titans' defense, has the ability to take over a game whenever he wants. **Grade: 8.4**

### David Thornton, LB

**Strengths:** Has good size and range in coverage. Has the speed and athleticism to run with tight ends down the seam. Has long arms and uses his hands to keep blockers away from his lower body. Delivers a good pop when taking on blockers.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to improve his lower-body strength and shed ability.

**Bottom line:** Thornton is a very good player who can play over the tight end or in space. **Grade: 7.8**

### ↑ Stephen Tulloch, LB

**Strengths:** Has good instincts. Aggressive and always is around the ball. Quick and agile; takes good angles to the ball. Strikes ballcarriers with a sudden burst. Plays at full speed but under control; breaks down plays and seldom overpursues.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks size, elite speed and the lower-body strength to hold his ground at the point of attack. Gets engulfed by blockers and doesn't use





## KEY MOVES

### 2007 DRAFT PICKS

Rd.-Pick

GRADE C-

**1-19 Michael Griffin, DB, Texas**

Can play anywhere in the secondary and is a beast on special teams.

**2-50 Chris Henry, RB, Arizona**

A raw talent who is a tough runner with good hands. Will split carries.

**3-80 Paul Williams, WR, Fresno State**

Can win jump balls but is inconsistent and not a strong blocker.

**4-115 Leroy Harris, G/C, N.C. State**

Has quick feet and good strength but needs better technique.

**4-128 Chris Davis, WR, Florida State**

A shifty runner who can play the slot. Also can return kicks.

**5-152 Antonio Johnson, DT, Mississippi State**

Must develop pass-rushing skills but could play a bit.

**6-188 Joel Filani, WR, Texas Tech**

Another receiver who can win jump balls; lacks great speed.

**6-204 Jacob Ford, DE, Central Arkansas**

An athletic project who lacks big-time experience.

**6-206 Ryan Smith, CB, Florida**

Could stick at a thin position; mostly would play special teams.

**7-223 Mike Otto, OT, Purdue**

Provides depth; first-year hope is to make it on special teams.

### VETERAN PLAYERS

**Additions:** LB Ryan Fowler (FA/Cowboys), WR Justin Gage (FA/Bears), LB Gilbert Gardner (waivers/Colts), CB Nick Harper (FA/Colts), QB Tim Rattay (FA/Buccaneers), Bryan Scott (FA/Saints), T Seth Wand (FA/Texans).

**Losses:** WR Drew Bennett (WR/Rams), LB Colby Bockwoldt (FA/49ers), RB Travis Henry (FA/Broncos), G Zach Piller (FA/Lions), DT Robaire Smith (FA/Browns), WR Bobby Wade (FA/Vikings).

As the nickel back in the slot, Cortland Finnegan was a pleasant surprise as a rookie. He's a physical player who will be even more effective with a year's experience. First-round pick Michael Griffin played safety in college but has been switched to cornerback. He has good size and footwork and is physical, but he figures to face something of a learning curve. If it's too steep, he could move back to safety because the club is counting on him to contribute right away. Ryan Smith, a sixth-round pick, also could help. He's undersized but plays the ball well and has good leaping ability.

At strong safety, Chris Hope had to adjust to a new defense last season. Once he did, he made a number of big plays, and he continued to get better as the season went on. Now that he has a total grasp of the team's concepts, he'll be even more effective.

Lamont Thompson, the team's free safety last season, will have competition in training camp from Calvin Lowry, Vincent Fuller, Donnie Nickey and newcomer Bryan Scott. Lowry is a good athlete, and the coaches were impressed with his instincts as a rookie. Scott brings another veteran presence to the group, but he needs to improve his technique.

**GRADE: B**

### SPECIAL TEAMS

The Titans had one of the NFL's top special teams units in '06, but they face uncertainties because of the suspension of Jones, one of the league's best returners. With Jones out for the

his hands well to shed. Still a young player who lacks experience in coverage.

**Bottom line:** Tulloch is a productive player with a nose for the ball. He has a good upside despite a lack of elite physical tools. **Grade: 7.5**

#### ↓ Nick Harper, CB

**Strengths:** Has good footwork and solid fundamentals on his backpedal. Takes little time to reach top speed; can explode out of his backpedal. Takes good angles to the ball while it's in the air. Has good recognition skills.

**Weaknesses:** Limited by a lack of ideal speed. Doesn't show a second gear tracking the ball downfield. Not physical at the point of attack.

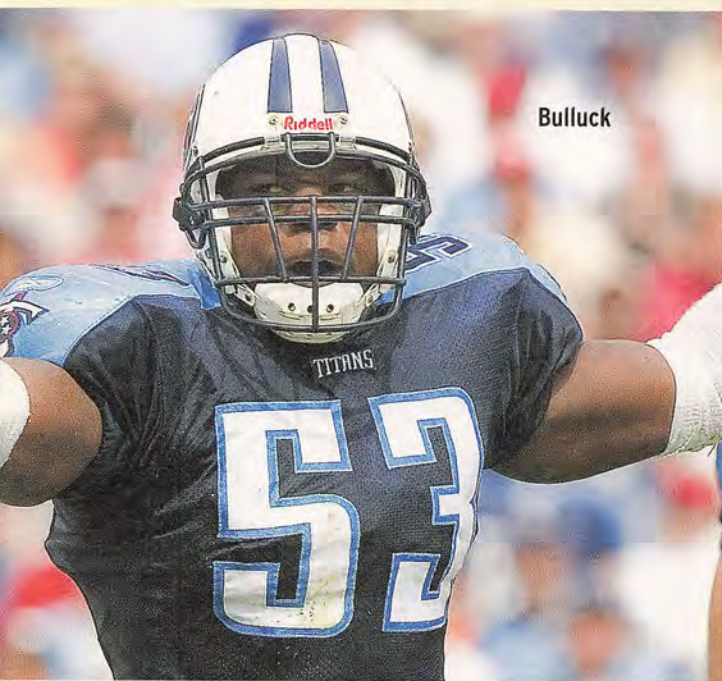
**Bottom line:** Hill seems ready to take his game to the next level. He's an excellent athlete who can get much better. **Grade: 6.9**

#### Chris Hope, S

**Strengths:** Loves football and plays with passion and intensity. Smart and understands where he needs to be. Has a good feel for the game and does a solid job reading routes and closing from center field. Plays with a mean streak and will hit hard.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to wrap up and finish tackles more consistently. Didn't make many big plays in the passing game before last season.

**Bottom line:** Hope is a stabilizing force in the Titans' secondary. **Grade: 8.0**



Bulluck

ALBERT DICKSON / SN

**Bottom line:** Harper is not at his best in man coverage, which is what he'll play in Tennessee. He needs to be more physical and aggressive to succeed. **Grade: 7.0**

#### Reynaldo Hill, CB

**Strengths:** Has decent size and speed. An adequate athlete who can change directions quickly. Has returned kicks and can contribute on special teams.

**Weaknesses:** Not dominant in any area; a better athlete than a player. Lacks instincts and tends to get caught out of position.

#### Lamont Thompson, S

**Strengths:** Has solid speed and range from center field. Reads routes and makes solid breaks on the ball. Has the ability to be an explosive and intimidating force in coverage. Has excellent ball skills and hands.

**Weaknesses:** Can be selective in run support; sometimes is hesitant and waits for the ballcarrier to get to him. Not a physical one-on-one tackler at the point of attack.

**Bottom line:** Thompson makes plays in the passing game but needs to get more physical and aggressive in run support. **Grade: 6.0**



season, others will need to step up and be productive. Jones has a knack for finding the holes in coverage units, as evidenced by his 26.1-yard average on kickoff returns, his league-best 12.9-yard punt return average and his three touchdowns on punt returns.

The Titans could look to Brandon Jones as the punt returner and Roby on kickoffs.

## STADIUM/MEDIA

LP Field (69,143, grass)

Tickets: 615-565-4200

Training camp: TBD; 615-565-4000

Radio: WKDF-FM (103.3)

Website: titansonline.com

Titans special teams coach Alan Lowry might also decide to give Finnegan a shot, but the team hasn't identified who might be next in the pecking order.

Kicker Rob Bironas made clutch kick after clutch kick

last season, and he also displayed a strong leg. Bironas was 22-of-28 on field goal attempts, and all of his misses sailed to the right, something he is working to correct.

Punter Craig Hentrich was effective in his 13th season, and the Titans are confident he can still perform at a high level for another one. **GRADE: B**

## BOTTOM LINE

After a great finish to 2006, the Titans have plenty of optimism. They took some big hits in the offseason, though, which could make taking the next step difficult. Young did some great things as a rookie, but his athleticism and ability to pull things off in dramatic fashion disguised the fact he has plenty of learning to do. He will keep getting better, but he's going to need some help.

The situation with Pacman Jones is a distraction, and losing a player of his caliber will hurt. Couple that with the lack of playmakers on offense and it will be difficult for the team to get over the hump and into the playoffs. **SN**

*Jim Wyatt covers the Titans for the Nashville Tennessean.*

## PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

### OFFENSE

**QB** ■ Vince Young  
● Kerry Collins  
**FB** ■ Ahmad Hall  
● Casey Cramer  
**RB** ● LenDale White  
● Chris Henry  
**WR** ■ David Givens  
□ Courtney Roby  
**WR** ■ Brandon Jones  
● Roydell Williams  
**TE** ● Ben Troupe  
■ Bo Scaife  
**LT** ■ Michael Roos  
□ Seth Wand  
**LG** ● Jacob Bell  
□ Justin Geisinger  
**C** ■ Kevin Mawae  
● Leroy Harris  
**RG** ● Benji Olson  
● Eugene Amano  
**RT** ■ David Stewart  
● Mike Otto

### DEFENSE

**LE** ■ Kyle Vanden Bosch  
□ Jacob Ford  
**LT** ■ Albert Haynesworth  
□ Antonio Johnson  
**RT** ● Randy Starks  
● Rien Long  
**RE** ● Travis LaBoy  
● Antwan Odom  
**SLB** ■ David Thornton  
● Robert Reynolds  
**MLB** ● Ryan Fowler  
● Stephen Tulloch  
**WLB** ▲ Keith Bulluck  
● LeVar Woods  
**LCB** ■ Nick Harper  
□ Michael Griffin  
**SS** ▲ Chris Hope  
● Calvin Lowry  
**FS** ● Lamont Thompson  
■ Bryan Scott  
**RCB** ● Reynaldo Hill  
● Cortland Finnegan

### SPECIALISTS

**K** ■ Rob Bironas  
**P** ■ Craig Hentrich  
**KR** ● Courtney Roby  
**PR** ● Brandon Jones  
**LS** ● Ken Amato

▲ Elite ■ Solid ● Adequate □ Fringe

Depth charts updated weekly at [sportingnews.com](http://sportingnews.com)



## TITANS ROSTER

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL exp.	College	How acq.	2006 GP/GS
QUARTERBACKS							
5	Kerry Collins	6-5/245	12/30/72	13	Penn State	FA/06	4/3
7	David Koral	6-3/222	11/27/82	1	UCLA	FA/07	0/0
13	Tim Rattay	6-0/200	3/15/77	8	Louisiana Tech	FA/07	4/2
14	Kent Smith	6-5/215	9/5/83	1	Central Michigan	FA/07	0/0
10	Vince Young	6-5/229	5/18/83	2	Texas	D1/06	15/13
RUNNING BACKS							
35	Quinton Ganther	5-9/214	7/15/84	2	Utah	D7c/06	2/0
45	Ahmad Hall (FB)	5-11/235	11/13/79	2	Texas	FA/06	14/7
29	Chris Henry	6-0/228	6/6/85	R	Arizona	D2/07	—
39	Dontrell Moore	5-9/208	9/25/82	1	New Mexico	FA/07	0/0
25	LenDale White	6-1/238	12/20/84	2	USC	D2/06	13/0
RECEIVERS							
48	Casey Cramer (TE)	6-2/250	1/5/82	3	Dartmouth	W-Car/06	15/0
17	Chris Davis	5-10/181	1/23/84	R	Florida State	D4b/07	—
16	Joel Filani	6-2/216	12/8/83	R	Texas Tech	D6a/07	—
12	Justin Gage	6-4/210	1/25/81	5	Missouri	FA/07	8/0
87	David Givens	6-0/215	8/16/80	6	Notre Dame	FA/06	5/5
47	Ben Hartsock (TE)	6-4/255	7/5/80	4	Ohio State	W-Ind/06	6/3
81	Brandon Jones	6-1/208	10/6/82	3	Oklahoma	D3b/05	16/10
14	Jonathan Orr	6-1/193	3/20/83	2	Wisconsin	D6/06	0/0
82	Courtney Roby	6-0/189	1/10/83	3	Indiana	D3a/05	12/0
80	Bo Scaife (TE)	6-3/249	1/6/81	3	Texas	D6/05	14/12
84	Ben Troupe (TE)	6-4/270	9/1/82	4	Florida	D2a/04	10/9
89	Cooper Wallace (TE)	6-3/258	4/26/82	1	Auburn	W-Chi/06	2/1
11	Paul Williams	6-1/209	12/2/83	R	Fresno State	D3/07	—
86	Roydell Williams	6-0/187	3/14/81	3	Tulane	D4c/05	14/0
OFFENSIVE LINEMEN							
54	Eugene Amano (C)	6-3/310	8/1/82	4	Southeast Missouri	D7b/04	16/1
60	Jacob Bell (G/T)	6-4/295	3/2/81	4	Miami (Ohio)	D5a/04	15/15
73	Justin Geisinger (C/G)	6-3/322	5/24/82	3	Vanderbilt	FA/06	2/0
64	Leroy Harris (G/C)	6-2/298	6/6/84	R	N.C. State	D4a/07	—
70	Daniel Loper (T)	6-6/320	1/15/82	3	Texas Tech	D5b/05	8/0
68	Kevin Mawae (C)	6-4/289	1/23/71	14	LSU	FA/06	16/16
75	Benji Olson (G)	6-4/320	6/5/75	10	Washington	D5/98	15/15
66	Mike Otto (T)	6-5/308	7/24/83	R	Purdue	D7/07	—
71	Michael Roos (T)	6-7/320	10/5/82	3	Eastern Washington	D2/05	16/16
72	Isaac Snell (G)	6-6/288	11/14/81	1	North Dakota St.	FA/06	0/0
76	David Stewart (T)	6-7/317	8/28/82	3	Mississippi State	D4b/05	14/14
72	Seth Wand (T)	6-7/330	8/6/79	5	NW Missouri State	FA/06	7/0
DEFENSIVE LINEMEN							
97	Tony Brown (E/T)	6-1/285	9/29/80	2	Memphis	FA/06	13/2
77	Sean Conover (E)	6-5/262	7/31/84	2	Bucknell	FA/06	6/2
78	Jacob Ford (E)	6-4/249	7/20/83	R	Central Arkansas	D6b/07	—
92	Albert Haynesworth (T)	6-6/320	6/17/81	6	Tennessee	D1/02	11/10
96	Antonio Johnson (T)	6-3/305	12/8/84	R	Mississippi State	D5/07	—
91	Travis LaBoy (E)	6-3/260	8/10/81	4	Hawaii	D2b/04	13/11
99	Rien Long (T)	6-6/300	8/7/81	5	Washington State	D4/03	0/0
94	Jesse Mahelona (T)	6-0/311	4/7/83	2	Tennessee	D5b/06	10/1
98	Antwan Odom (E)	6-4/277	9/24/81	4	Alabama	D2c/04	4/2
95	Josh Savage (E)	6-4/276	9/28/80	3	Utah	W-Ari/06	5/0
90	Randy Starks (T)	6-3/307	12/14/83	4	Maryland	D3a/04	16/8
93	Kyle Vanden Bosch (E)	6-4/278	11/17/78	7	Nebraska	FA/05	16/16
LINEBACKERS							
47	Colin Allred	6-1/238	4/15/83	1	Baylor	FA/06	0/0
58	Ken Amato (LS)	6-2/245	5/18/77	5	Montana State	FA/03	15/0
53	Keith Bulluck	6-3/235	4/4/77	8	Syracuse	D1/00	16/16
52	Ryan Fowler	6-3/250	5/20/82	4	Duke	FA/07	16/0
	Gilbert Gardner	6-1/228	5/9/82	4	Purdue	W-Ind/07	15/12
57	Terna Nande	6-0/230	6/17/83	2	Miami (Ohio)	D5a/06	1/0
51	Robert Reynolds	6-3/242	5/20/81	4	Ohio State	D5b/04	4/0
50	David Thornton	6-2/230	11/1/78	6	North Carolina	FA/06	16/13
49	Spencer Toone	6-2/240	8/25/80	2	Utah	D7b/06	3/0
55	Stephen Tulloch	5-11/235	1/1/85	2	N.C. State	D4b/06	16/3
49	LeVar Woods	6-3/244	3/15/78	7	Iowa	FA/06	14/0
DEFENSIVE BACKS							
31	Cortland Finnegan (CB)	5-10/188	2/2/84	2	Samford	D7a/06	16/2
22	Vincent Fuller (S)	6-1/187	8/3/82	3	Virginia Tech	D4a/05	16/0
	Michael Griffin (CB/S)	6-0/195	1/4/85	R	Texas	D1/07	—
20	Nick Harper (CB)	5-10/182	9/10/74	7	Fort Valley State	FA/01	15/15
21	Reynaldo Hill (CB)	5-11/187	8/28/82	3	Florida	D7/05	15/14
24	Chris Hope (S)	5-11/206	9/29/80	6	Florida State	FA/06	16/16
30	Eric King (CB)	5-10/185	5/10/82	3	Wake Forest	W-But/06	11/0
37	Calvin Lowry (S)	5-11/200	2/13/83	2	Penn State	D4a/06	16/0
23	Donnie Nickey (S)	6-3/215	4/25/80	5	Ohio State	D5/03	16/0
38	Bryan Scott (S)	6-1/219	4/13/81	5	Penn State	FA/07	9/0
41	Ryan Smith (CB)	5-10/168	7/17/85	R	Florida	D6c/07	—
28	Lamont Thompson (S)	6-1/220	7/30/78	6	Washington State	FA/03	16/16
36	Michael Waddell (CB)	5-10/180	1/9/81	4	North Carolina	D4/04	0/0
26	Andre Woolfolk (CB)	6-2/197	1/26/80	5	Oklahoma	D1/03	10/1
SPECIALISTS							
2	Rob Bironas (K)	6-0/205	1/29/78	3	Georgia Southern	FA/05	16/0
15	Craig Hentrich (P)	6-3/213	5/18/71	14	Notre Dame	FA/98	16/0

Abbreviations: D1-draft pick, first round; W-claimed on waivers; T-obtained in trade; FA-free-agent acquisition.

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# NFC PREL

## East

### 1. Cowboys 13-3

Bill Parcells laid the foundation for both Tony Romo and the 3-4 defense to grow, so Wade Phillips is well positioned to make the silver star shine much brighter this season.

### 2. Eagles 9-7

Even if Donovan McNabb is not 100 percent, Andy Reid's savvy coaching and Brian Westbrook's explosive running will keep the playoffs within reach.

### 3. Giants 6-10

Just how valuable was Tiki Barber? His retirement will hurt both the team's offensive efficiency and its locker room. The defensive back seven isn't in good shape, either.

### 4. Redskins 5-11

Poor investments in the nation's capital have damaged the team's chances of winning. Unless it can successfully lobby to get out of one of the NFL's toughest divisions, the struggles will continue.

## South

### 1. Saints 12-4

A one-year wonder? No way. This is a talented team that will stay in the NFC title race with Sean Payton, Drew Brees, Reggie Bush and a healthy dose of improved secondary play.

### 2. Panthers 7-9

Caught between contending and rebuilding, Carolina is watching its window of opportunity slowly sliding shut. If Jake Delhomme can't shake off his shaky 2006, the team will be left stuck in the middle.

### 3. Falcons 5-11

New coach Bobby Petrino has a good plan for Michael Vick, but it won't all work in their first year together. The defense has been hampered by injuries and defections.

### 4. Buccaneers 5-11

Monte Kiffin's defense got some much-needed fresh blood in Cato June and rookie Gaines Adams, but coach Jon Gruden must clean up an injury-riddled offensive mess.

## Wild-card games

Bears over Eagles, 49ers over Seahawks

## Divisional games

Cowboys over 49ers, Saints over Bears

## North

### 1. Bears 10-6

Any symptoms of a Super Bowl hangover for Rex Grossman and the defense will be cured by the fact the defending NFC champs play in the NFL's weakest division.

### 2. Packers 8-8

Brett Favre has the offensive supporting cast to make one more playoff push, but the defense—despite some young stars—might not have enough to get the team above .500.

### 3. Vikings 6-10

The running game and run defense are obvious strengths, but weaknesses in the passing game—now handed to second-year man Tarvaris Jackson—and the pass defense outweigh them.

### 4. Lions 5-11

The Lions are lucky they have the potential for a big passing game with Calvin Johnson and Roy Williams. With the team's defensive problems, they'll be throwing often to play catch-up.

## West

### 1. 49ers 10-6

Call this team—with its 3-4 defense and a big-time back who wears No. 21 (Frank Gore)—“Chargers Lite.” Watch out, NFC: This team is loaded with upgraded personnel.

### 2. Seahawks 10-6

Seattle's hold on the division got very loose after last season's sweep by San Francisco. But assuming the Seahawks are healthy, they have the talent and coaching to grab a wild card.

### 3. Rams 7-9

Marc Bulger, Steven Jackson and Torry Holt form the foundation of one of the league's most prolific and exciting offenses, but the defense remains largely a wasteland.

### 4. Cardinals 6-10

Although coach Ken Whisenhunt will install a Steelers-like will and toughness, the oasis in the desert will remain more of a mirage until next season.

## NFC championship game

Cowboys over Saints

## Super Bowl 42

Patriots over Cowboys

# DICTIONS





# CARDINALS

**Two constants in the Valley have been change and losing. A rookie coach will try to change that.**

**SN PICK** 4th, NFC West (6-10)

By KENT SOMERS

Arizonans are accustomed to certain things: Snowbirds visiting in the winter. Citrus trees blooming in the spring. Temperatures hitting triple digits in the summer.

The Cardinals hiring a new coach every three years or so.

So it wasn't surprising last January when the team dumped Dennis Green after three seasons and 16 victories. Enter Ken Whisenhunt, the team's seventh full-time coach since the Cards moved to Arizona in 1988.

He comes from Pittsburgh, where the Steelers bludgeoned opponents with a punishing ground game yet weren't afraid to take shots downfield or use gadget plays.

One of the biggest challenges for the new staff will be to rebuild the offensive line. In fact, this season could hinge on whether new line coach Russ Grimm can mold a quality group.

Whisenhunt's biggest job, however, will be to change attitudes and increase the team's football IQ. Under Green, the Cardinals continually mismanaged the clock, committed stupid penalties and made mistakes at the most inopportune times.

## OFFENSE

Whisenhunt is a creative play-caller, and he'll handle that role initially for the Cardinals. Coordinator Todd Haley, formerly the Cowboys' receivers coach, will have a large say in game planning and might call the plays eventually. Whisenhunt would like to run the ball almost 60 percent of the time, but he knows the strength of this team is its passing game. It would be foolish not to get the ball to receivers Anquan Boldin and Larry Fitzgerald.

**Quarterbacks**—Matt Leinart's talents helped make the Cardinals' coaching job an attractive one. Leinart was impressive as a rookie after replacing Kurt Warner as the starter, but it wasn't easy. Leinart endured an in-season change of coordinators, and it often was hard to discern what the Cardinals were trying to accomplish on offense.

Leinart's fundamentals suffered, and the new staff spent this offseason trying

## SCHEDULE

All times Eastern

Sept. 10	at San Francisco*	10:15
Sept. 16	SEATTLE	4:05
Sept. 23	at Baltimore	1:00
Sept. 30	PITTSBURGH	4:15
Oct. 7	at St. Louis	1:00
Oct. 14	CAROLINA	4:05
Oct. 21	at Washington	1:00
Oct. 28	Open date	
Nov. 4	at Tampa Bay	1:00
Nov. 11	DETROIT	4:15
Nov. 18	at Cincinnati	1:00
Nov. 25	SAN FRANCISCO	4:05
Dec. 2	CLEVELAND	4:05
Dec. 9	at Seattle	4:05
Dec. 16	at New Orleans	1:00
Dec. 23	ATLANTA	4:05
Dec. 30	ST. LOUIS	4:15

Strength of schedule: 32nd

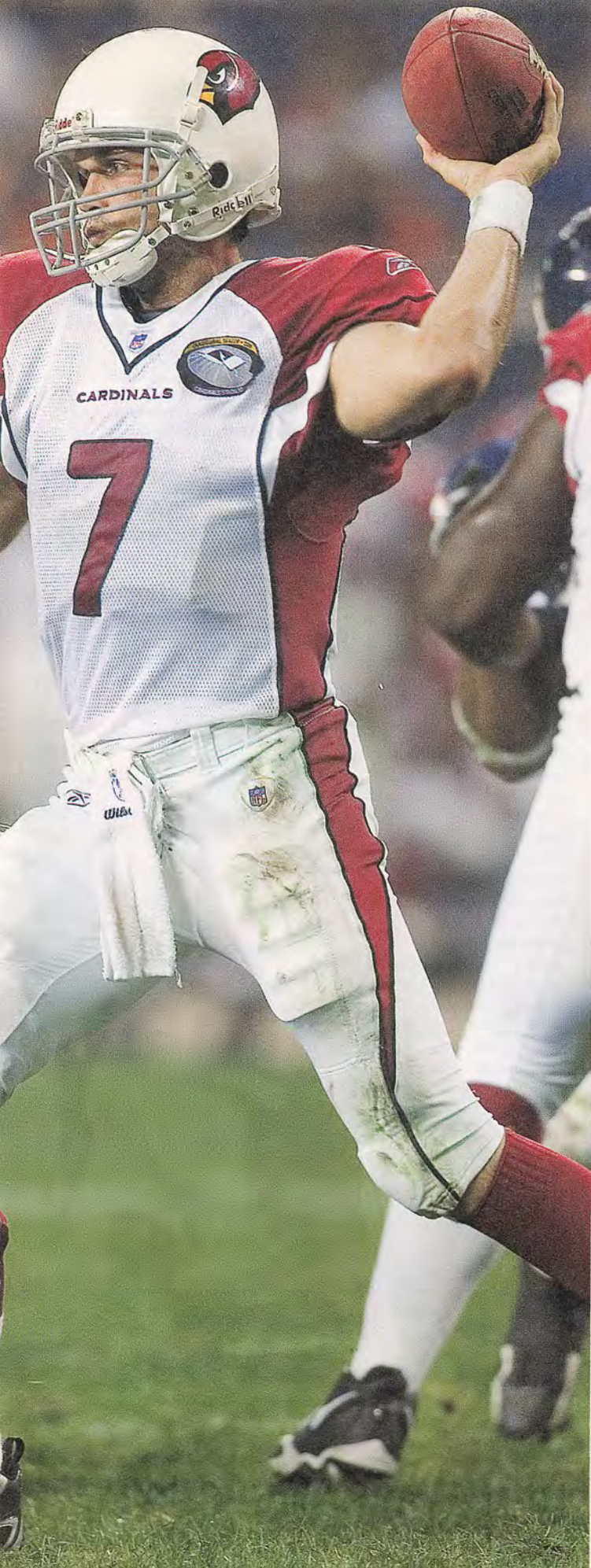
\*Monday

Analysis of every Cardinals game:  
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## REGULAR-SEASON WINS



Leinart



to improve his footwork. Leinart also was a regular at offseason workouts—good thing, because he needs to get stronger to withstand the pounding an NFL quarterback takes. A healthy running game would give him more time to find Boldin and Fitzgerald on play-action passes.

Warner is the perfect backup to Leinart. He's smart and analytical, and he has seen nearly everything defenses can offer. Warner is a great resource in the classroom, on the practice field and on game day. Warner also can be an effective short-term starter should Leinart go down. If Warner has to play, the Cardinals will need to devote all their resources to protecting him. Without excellent protection, he's prone to turnovers.

There isn't much behind Leinart and Warner; Shane Boyd is the leading contender for the No. 3 job. **GRADE: B**

**Running backs**—At first glance, Edgerrin James doesn't seem to fit this offense. He is a hunt-and-peck kind of runner whose best attributes are his vision and agility. He hasn't run behind a fullback much. Whisenhunt's offense, which will use a fullback about half the time and two tight ends the other half, seems built for one-cut runners who hit the hole hard and don't dance much.

Yet Whisenhunt seems confident that James can thrive in his scheme. He has watched tape of James making the same kinds of cuts and decisions in one-back formations that he'll be making while running behind a fullback.

James' backup, Marcel Shipp, isn't a big-play threat, but his style seems to be a good fit in this offense. He's a physical runner who hits the hole quickly. J.J. Arrington is the team's fastest back, but he has yet to show he can play at the NFL level.

Terrelle Smith is the prototypical blocking fullback. He'll block and not be asked to do much else. **GRADE: B**

**Receivers**—Whisenhunt compares Boldin to the Steelers' Hines Ward. Boldin doesn't have great speed, but he can beat

## SCOUT TAKES

### A scout from another team sizes up the Cardinals

I think they'll be a more disciplined offense under **Ken Whisenhunt**. He'll get more out of that group than most people could because of his personality and the relationship he'll have with the players. ... I don't think ideally they're quite ready to switch to a 3-4 defense. Moving **Bertrand Berry** and **Chike Okeafor** from end to outside linebacker is a little bit of wishful thinking. They'll be able to rush the passer from there, but if they have to drop into coverage it won't be a pretty sight. ... Both of their top two draft picks excite me. **Levi Brown** is a legitimate tackle who's big and athletic. He'll go through his growing pains, as all young guys do in this league. But he's a guy who's going to help legitimize their offensive line a little more. We all thought **Alan Branch** was a very talented player, and he'll fit in well with their other defensive linemen.



TOM HAUCK FOR SN

JAY DROWNS / SN

cornerbacks deep because of his strength and desire. He's at his best, however, on shorter routes, especially if he can catch the ball on the run. He's a very dangerous runner because he's strong, quick and tough. Boldin most often will work out of the slot, but defenses also will have to deal with him out of the backfield. Like Ward, Boldin played some quarterback in college and has a good arm, something the team hasn't taken advantage of in the past.

Fitzgerald doesn't have great speed, either, but his size and body control make him a deep threat. The new staff will work hard with Fitzgerald on his route running. After matching up against Fitzgerald last year, Broncos cornerback Champ Bailey said he tipped off many of his routes.

Bryant Johnson is a solid third receiver who can get deep, but he dropped passes at inopportune times last season. LeRon McCoy missed last season with a thumb injury. He has speed but little experience. The coaches believe fifth-round pick Steve Breaston can develop into a reliable receiver.

Tight end is a real concern. Second-year pro Leonard Pope is the starter, but the Cardinals need to complement him with a veteran who can block and help upgrade the running game. Rookie Ben Patrick could play more than most seventh-round picks if the team is unable to find the right veteran. **GRADE: A**

**Line**—If this unit can be competent, the Cardinals will score enough to be competitive. Poor personnel decisions led to Green's downfall—he cut good players, played others out of position, failed to develop youngsters and went through three line coaches in three years. If Grimm can build a solid unit, he'll be worth every penny of the \$1.3 million a year the Cardinals are paying him. One of Grimm's offseason objectives is to get many of the linemen to lose weight to improve their quickness and speed.

The coaches haven't decided which side tackle Levi Brown, the team's first-round draft pick, will play. He'll start out on the right, which is Leinart's blind side, even though Brown played left tackle at Penn State. Brown has what Grimm wants in a player: He's mobile and a tenacious run blocker. Brown needs to work on his pass protection.

## FANTASY SOURCE PICKS

### DRAFT-DAY BARGAIN

RB Edgerrin James

### COMEBACK CANDIDATE

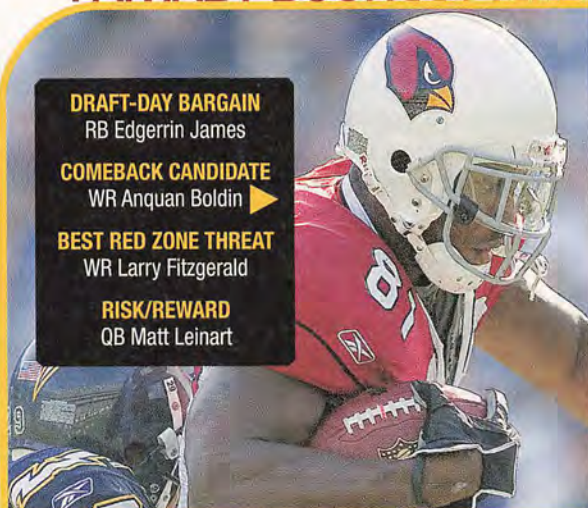
WR Anquan Boldin ▶

### BEST RED ZONE THREAT

WR Larry Fitzgerald

### RISK/REWARD

QB Matt Leinart



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TODD WARSHAW FOR SN

## SCOUTING REPORTS: OFFENSE

### ↑ Matt Leinart, QB

**Strengths:** Has ideal size and strength, long arms and big hands. Makes all the necessary throws and is very accurate. Hits receivers in stride and away from defenders. Has a high release point that receivers love. Reads defenses well and finds open receivers quickly. A tremendous leader who isn't easily rattled.

**Weaknesses:** Has below-average mobility. Struggles against pressure when flushed to the right. Has a long throwing motion that gives defensive backs a chance to get a jump on some passes.

**Bottom line:** Leinart won't be helped by having to learn a second offensive system in two years as a pro, but he has what it takes to be a top starter.

**Grade: 8.1**

### Edgerrin James, RB

**Strengths:** Has excellent vision and an explosive burst to the hole. Runs with low pad level, great balance and leg drive. Breaks arm tackles and has a very strong stiff-arm. Has speed to get to the corner and excellent cutback ability. Can make defenders miss in the open field.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks breakaway speed. Not much of a blocker and doesn't always give full effort on blitz pickups.

**Bottom line:** James still is one of the best runners in the game, but he didn't get a chance to show it in 2006 because of the Cardinals' subpar line. New coach Ken Whisenhunt will emphasize the run, and with QB Matt Leinart a year wiser, look for Edge to return to form. **Grade: 9.2**

### ↑ Anquan Boldin, WR

**Strengths:** Has size. Plays tough. Consistently makes plays over the middle. Runs smoothly with no wasted motion. Picks up yardage after the catch. Excellent quickness in and out of

cuts. Has great body control and good change-of-direction skills.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks deep speed. Struggles on hitches and comeback routes.

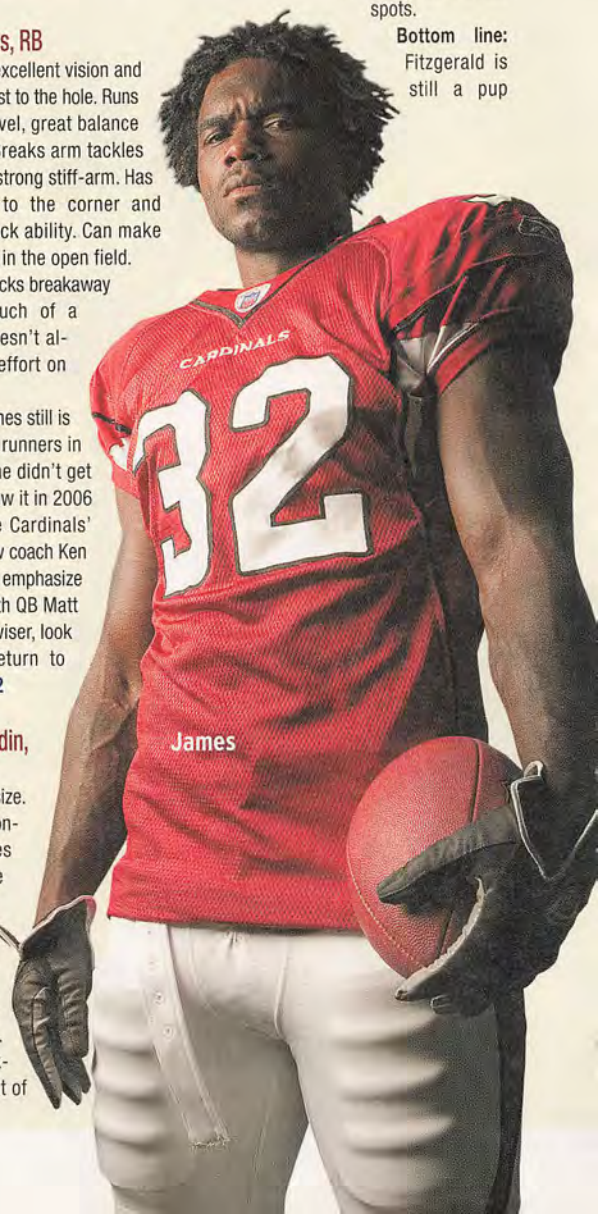
**Bottom line:** Boldin is part of one of the league's most explosive receiver combos—and he still has a huge upside. **Grade: 8.9**

### ↑ Larry Fitzgerald, WR

**Strengths:** Has excellent size. Runs very crisp routes; is very smooth and explodes in and out of cuts. Quick and mobile enough to get by press coverage. A dangerous runner after the catch. Makes all varieties of catches. Plays very well in the red zone.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks elite vertical speed. Could be more precise in his ability to find open spots.

**Bottom line:** Fitzgerald is still a pup



Players are graded by War Room scouts on a 1-10 scale.

\*Rookies (not graded)

and only getting better. His professionalism and work ethic will help him become one of the league's most productive re-cievers. **Grade: 8.9**

#### ↓ Bryant Johnson, WR

**Strengths:** Has good instincts. Comes back and helps the quarterback when a play breaks down. Not afraid to go over the middle. Catches the ball in traffic. Adjusts to poorly thrown balls. **Weaknesses:** Lacks elite deep speed. Has difficulty gaining separation against tight man coverage. Durability is a concern.

**Bottom line:** Given the chance to start last season when Fitzgerald was injured, Johnson showed he could deliver big plays. But he'll have fewer opportunities this season because the new staff will use fewer three-receiver sets. **Grade: 6.1**

#### Leonard Pope, TE

**Strengths:** Has superior receiving skills and excellent size. His big hands, long arms and tall frame help him battle for passes. Especially good at finding soft spots in zones. Gets body turned upfield and into playmaking position. **Weaknesses:** Not a vertical threat. Struggles to get a clean release off the line. Lacks the bulk and strength to be a dominant blocker; must improve at hitting targets at the second level.

**Bottom line:** Pope has good tools and athletic ability but needs time to develop, especially as a blocker. **Grade: 6.0**

#### Mike Gandy, T

**Strengths:** Takes decent angles to blocks. Plays with leverage and works to sustain blocks. Stays balanced. Can anchor against bull rushers.

**Weaknesses:** Lack of athletic ability limits him in space. Not effective on pulls and traps. Inconsistent at hitting moving targets. Lacks quick change-of-direction skills. Struggles to get inside against stunts and blitzes. Lacks durability.

**Bottom line:** Gandy has had trouble staying on the field. He will compete for the left tackle job, but he is a marginal starter. **Grade: 6.0**

#### \*Levi Brown, T

**Strengths:** Has elite athleticism. Always quick off the snap. Excels at position blocks in the run game. Sets up fast and punches hard in pass protection. Strong enough to torque pass

rushers off their feet.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks aggressiveness. Stands too upright at times, which leads to poor technique and difficulty changing direction. Doesn't consistently drive his man off the line.

**Bottom line:** Expect Brown to be a starter right away, but his long-term future as a pro depends on his willingness to work hard on every snap.

#### ↑ Deuce Lutui, G

**Strengths:** Uses massive frame well; seldom loses balance once he locks on to an opponent. Anchors well against bigger, stronger pass rushers. Can mirror and slide if set properly. Has surprising short-area agility.

**Weaknesses:** Must lose weight to improve speed, mobility and open-field ability. Has trouble blocking downfield. Overextends and lunges.

**Bottom line:** Lutui's experience in a pro-style system at USC helped him become a starter as a rookie. If he can keep his weight under control, he has the ability to be a longtime starter.

**Grade: 7.2**

#### Reggie Wells, G

**Strengths:** Has outstanding size and bulk. Moves quickly out of his stance. Has solid straight-line mobility and decent short-area pass protection ability. Moves quickly out of his stance.

**Weaknesses:** Struggles to make plays moving laterally. Doesn't finish blocks.

**Bottom line:** Wells showed his versatility last season by playing right tackle, but he's back at guard, where he can put his nastiness in the run game to good use. **Grade: 7.0**

#### Al Johnson, C

**Strengths:** Physical at the point of attack. Plays under control. An effective downfield blocker. Picks up stunts and blitzes. Stays balanced and rarely lunges. One-gap defenders rarely beat him with their first step.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks lower-body strength and is not a powerful drive blocker. Can be a liability in short-yardage and goal-line situations.

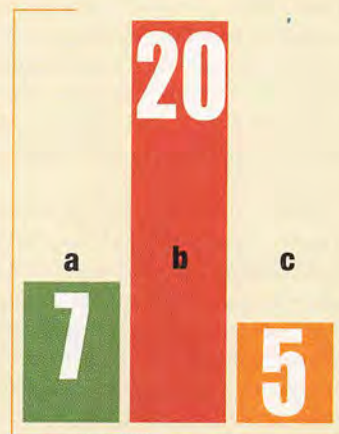
**Bottom line:** Johnson is at his best as a pass protector, though he is fundamentally sound in the run game. He could anchor the Cardinals' line for a long time. **Grade: 7.3**

**KEY:** ↑ Ascending ↓ Descending

## INSIDERS POLL

With Ken Whisenhunt and Russ Grimm in town, the Cardinals' running game will:

- a) Be a lot like Pittsburgh's
- b) Rise to the middle of the pack
- c) Remain weak



Based on a poll of SN's 32 team correspondents

## BOLD PREDICTIONS

**1** There will be grumbling about the tough, physical practices under Whisenhunt. The team seldom hit in training camp under former coach Dennis Green, and the lack of toughness showed in the fall.

**2** Young Matt Leinart will blossom under the new coaching staff. Coach Ken Whisenhunt proved in Pittsburgh with Ben Roethlisberger that he knows how to develop a young quarterback.

**3** Russ Grimm will get more out of this offensive line than many thought possible. For the first time in years, the club has a head coach that trusts his offensive line coach.

Free-agent acquisition Mike Gandy also will get a look at right tackle, but he has played on the left side most of his career and he'll compete with Oliver Ross for that spot. Ross has struggled in his two seasons in Arizona, but he played well in Pittsburgh for Grimm and the coaching change seems to have rejuvenated him.

The coaches would prefer to use Reggie Wells at left guard, even though he played fairly well at right tackle last season. The staff wants strength and mobility at guard, and Wells and right guard Deuce Lutui fit that mold. Gandy and Milford Brown will get looks at left guard as well.

Center Al Johnson was signed as a free agent because the coaches weren't certain last year's starter, Nick Leckey, could hold up over a whole season given his lack of size (6-3, 286).

**GRADE: D**

## DEFENSE

Clancy Pendergast, one of the few holdovers from Green's staff, is considered one of the league's most creative coordinators. He'll show even more stuff this season. Whisenhunt, who faced Dick LeBeau's blitz-oriented defense in Steelers practices every day, wants to see the Cardinals use more zone blitz packages. Whisenhunt says the 4-3 will remain a big part of the

scheme, but don't be surprised if the Cardinals use a 3-4 alignment most of the time.

**Line**—There is enough versatility here to keep Pendergast dreaming up new ideas. Bertrand Berry and Chike Okefor can be ends in a three-point stance or stand up as 3-4 linebackers. In offseason workouts, those two were working on their pass drops as well as their pass-rush moves. Tackle Darnell Dockett would move to left end in the 3-4, and Antonio Smith would be on the right side.

Dockett's quickness and speed make him a potentially disruptive force in the backfield. But he went long stretches without making a play last season. Smith has been an effective backup the past two years, but it's questionable how effective he'll be as a starter. He does have some skills as a pass rusher.

Whisenhunt knows how many problems an elite nose tackle can cause after watching Casey Hampton in Pittsburgh. That's why the club traded up to draft Alan Branch with the first pick of the second round. Branch will compete against Kendrick Clancy and second-year man Gabe Watson for playing time. Branch is athletic and versatile enough to play end in the 3-4 at times. Clancy has played over the nose before, and Watson is a run stuffer with the size (335 pounds) and strength to force double-teams.

Like most teams, there isn't much depth in this unit. Chris Cooper is a solid rotational guy at both tackle and end. Outside linebacker Calvin Pace probably is the team's third-best pass rusher, so he'll get some work at end, too. **GRADE: C**

**Linebackers**—There are many questions to answer here. One is: Can Karlos Dansby deliver on his star potential? He's big enough to take on tight ends and fast enough to cover running backs in the flat. His speed and long arms make him an effective pass rusher. He was in Green's doghouse last year after missing most of the offseason with injuries. Now healthy, Dansby will move inside in the Cardinals' 3-4 alignment. His size (6-4, 243) and speed could make him an impact player at that spot.

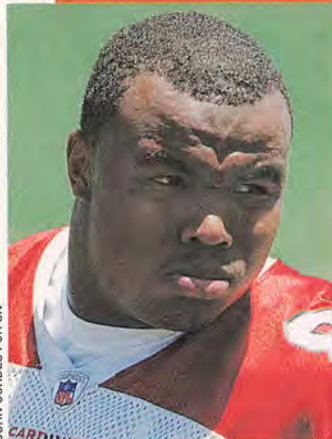
Fellow inside linebacker Gerald Hayes has established himself as a long-range starter. He's tough against the run. Third-round pick Buster Davis is only 5-9, but he packs a big punch and the game means a lot to him. He'll provide much-needed depth inside.

On the outside, Berry needs to regain his productivity after

## SECRET WEAPON

### LEONARD POPE, TE

Pope had a small role in the Cardinals' passing game as a rookie in 2006, but look for the new coaches to take advantage of Pope's 6-8 frame this season. Quarterback Matt Leinart does a good job of rolling out and finding receivers, and Pope will be an inviting target near the back of the end zone.



JOHN CORDES FOR SN

## SCOUTING REPORTS: DEFENSE

### Darnell Dockett, E

**Strengths:** Shows good athleticism and quickness as a one-gap penetrator. Locates the ball well. Keeps good separation from defenders. Has above average change-of-direction skills.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks strength at the point of attack. Occasionally overpursues.

**Bottom line:** With his tools, Dockett could wreak havoc on offensive linemen for years to come. **Grade: 7.3**

### Antonio Smith, E

**Strengths:** Explosive off the snap. Uses his hands well to set up blockers. Gives great effort. Has range to make plays all over the field. Plays with nastiness and toughness.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to become more consistent against the run. Must work on his overall strength and power.

**Bottom line:** Smith has shown flashes as an injury replacement for Bertrand Berry the past two seasons. He could start on the right side in the 3-4. **Grade: 6.3**

### \*Alan Branch, NT

**Strengths:** Can clog the middle against the run. Sheds one-on-one blocks well and holds his ground against double-teams. Uses his hands to jolt run blockers and drive past blockers into the quarterback. Has good instincts. Identifies plays quickly and locates the ball. Plays surprisingly fast.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks elite speed and burst off the snap to shoot gaps. Has no real pass-rush moves other than a bull rush. Doesn't play with consistent leverage.

**Bottom line:** Branch can be an ideal nose tackle in a 3-4, but he also could struggle if he doesn't raise his intensity and consistency.

### Chike Okefor, LB

**Strengths:** Has excellent upper-body strength and can anchor at the point of attack. Plays with a good motor. Has a quick first step; able to beat most offensive tackles off the snap. Has the range to make plays in pursuit.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal size and is weak against the run. Wears down when teams run at him. Must be moving to be effective. Lacks lower-body strength. Undisciplined at times.

**Bottom line:** Okefor's quickness and athleticism make him very dangerous as a pass rusher, but he will always

struggle against good running attacks. **Grade: 7.8**

### ↑Bertrand Berry, LB

**Strengths:** Plays with lots of intensity. Has good speed and range and great instincts. A solid tackler. Moves very well along the line of scrimmage. Outstanding first-step quickness. Uses hands well to gain separation.

**Weaknesses:** Struggles with runs at him. Can be engulfed by big linemen.

**Bottom line:** Berry is an outstanding edge rusher who can change a game. He is the Cardinals' best defender when healthy, which hasn't been often the past two seasons. **Grade: 7.2**

### Karlos Dansby, LB

**Strengths:** Has solid instincts and playmaking ability. Excellent in space. Consistently slips blocks. Has great speed and explosiveness. Very good open-field tackler. Can turn and run with tight ends in man coverage. Comfortable in zone coverage.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to improve ability to shed and stack at the line. Less effective against inside runs.

**Bottom line:** Dansby is one of the best athletes on the Cardinals' defense. If he can stay healthy for an entire season, he has a chance to make the Pro Bowl. **Grade: 7.1**

### ↑Gerald Hayes, LB

**Strengths:** Versatile. Can step up and fill the hole. Has good stack-and-shed abilities. Locates the ball well. A solid special teams player.

**Weaknesses:** Still needs to improve his coverage ability and range. Wore down at the end of last season.

**Bottom line:** Hayes is coming off a breakout season in which he proved he can be a solid starter. **Grade: 7.0**

### ↑Antrel Rolle, CB

**Strengths:** A physical player. Best in press coverage, where he can use his size, strength and intensity.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks elite speed and change-of-direction ability. Will struggle against quicker receivers who get a clean break off the line.

**Bottom line:** Rolle has the physical attributes and athletic ability to be a good corner, but he must stay healthy and play with the same vigor and confidence that made him a first-round pick. **Grade: 7.8**

Rolle



TODD WARSHAW FOR SN

**Roderick Hood, CB**

**Strengths:** Has super athleticism and speed and good burst to the ball. Can turn and run with anyone. Does not waste motion. Has the speed to recover from mistakes and is great in man-to-man. Always around the ball and is a solid open-field tackler. Has big-play potential.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal size. Struggles against bigger receivers downfield.

**Bottom line:** Hood's best fit is in a role as nickel cornerback and special teams contributor. He isn't a starter. **Grade: 6.9**

**Adrian Wilson, S**

**Strengths:** Has ideal speed and athleticism. Very effective against the run and wraps up well. A strong tackler who looks for the big hit. Can be intimidating in the deep half. Displays good effort and competitiveness.

**Weaknesses:** Doesn't have much directional speed. Lacks range and doesn't make plays. Has trouble shedding blocks and has below-average change-of-direction skills.

**Bottom line:** Wilson is one of the best players on the Cardinals' roster. He is limited in coverage but plays well with the ball in front of him and is strong as a blitzing and in run support. **Grade: 8.1**

**Terrence Holt, S**

**Strengths:** Intelligent and instinctive. Plays bigger than his size suggests. Aggressive against the run, takes good angles and is an excellent open-field tackler. Physical in man-to-man and savvy in deep zone coverage. Has long arms and excellent leaping ability and ball skills.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal size, speed and fluidity. Struggles in man-to-man against faster receivers downfield. Loses balance against quicker receivers and double moves. Lacks recovery speed.

**Bottom line:** Holt can play the deep middle with good range, is a willing run supporter and can make plays in the open field. He is an upgrade over Robert Griffith and will allow Adrian Wilson to do more freelancing and be more aggressive to the ball.

**Grade: 6.7**

## KEY MOVES

### 2007 DRAFT PICKS

Rd.-Pick

GRADE **B****1-5 Levi Brown, OT, Penn State**

A tenacious run blocker who needs refinement in passing sets.

**2-33 Alan Branch, NT, Michigan**

Strong, athletic and runs well for someone his size (6-5, 324).

**3-69 Buster Davis, ILB, Florida State**

Loves to hit and is a leader but is undersized (5-9, 239).

**5-142 Steve Breaston, WR/KR, Michigan**

Provides a big-play threat for the club's weak return game.

**7-215 Ben Patrick, TE, Delaware**

A decent receiver who must work on his blocking to contribute.

### VETERAN PLAYERS

**Additions:** OL Mike Gandy (FA/Bills), S Terrence Holt (FA/Lions), CB Roderick Hood (FA/Eagles), C Al Johnson (FA/Cowboys), WR Sean Morey (FA/Steelers), FB Terrelle Smith (FA/Browns).

**Losses:** TE Adam Bergen (FA), LB James Darling (FA), OT Leonard Davis (FA/Cowboys), S Robert Griffith (FA), LB Orlando Huff (FA), OL Chris Liwienski (FA/Dolphins), CB David Macklin (FA/Redskins), QB John Navarre (FA/Colts), C Alex Stepanovich (FA/Bengals), TE Fred Wakefield (FA/Raiders), WR Troy Walters (FA).

missing the latter half of the past two seasons with injuries. Okefor improved his play when Berry went down last season. Okefor is light (265 pounds) for an end but has good size for an outside linebacker—and he can rush the passer.

Berry and Okefor will be backed up on the outside by Pace, who probably is the team's third-best pass rusher and will get his chances on passing downs. Pace will get some work at end, too.

When the Cardinals use a 4-3, Dansby will move to the strong side and Hayes will be in the middle. There is no set starter on the weak side. Brandon Johnson and Darryl Blackstock have not yet shown they can step up. **GRADE: C-**

**Secondary**—The cornerbacks were so poorly coached the past few years that passing judgment on young players such as Antrel Rolle and Eric Green is unfair. The new coaches think both can be effective players, though neither one is a shutdown corner. Rolle is smart and tough and an excellent tackler. With some work on technique, he can become an above-average player. Green has considerable athletic ability, but mental lapses have caused him to be burned for big plays. He also needs to get stronger.

Roderick Hood was signed as a free agent to shore up the position. He'll battle with Green for one starting job, with the loser likely being the nickel back. Like Rolle, Hood is tough. As is the case with many positions on this team, the lack of depth is scary.

Strong safety Adrian Wilson is the most versatile player at his position in the NFL. His coverage skills have improved greatly, and he always has been a devastating run defender.

To help out in coverage, the club signed Terrence Holt to play free safety. A teammate of Wilson's at N.C. State, Holt will be asked to cover a lot of ground as the lone deep man when Wilson plays near the line. Backup safety Aaron Francisco also is solid, and there won't be much drop-off when he's forced to play. **GRADE: C**

## SPECIAL TEAMS

Kicker Neil Rackers slipped last season but that was bound to happen after his spectacular 2005 season, one of the best in NFL history. Rackers believes improved health—a foot injury hindered him in '06—and the loss of 5 to 7 pounds will help him. Punter Scott Player is reliable, but he hasn't been as effective in recent years.

## STADIUM/MEDIA

University of Phoenix Stadium  
(63,400, grass)

Tickets: 602-379-0102

Training camp: Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, Ariz.; 928-523-1818.

Radio: KTAR-AM (620); KMVP-AM (860)

Website: azcardinals.com

Under Green, the return units were terrible and the coverage units worse. The team focused on making upgrades and keeping their better holdovers. Shipp and linebacker Monty Beisel were re-signed. Receiver Sean Morey, a fierce cover man, was signed from Pittsburgh. Davis, the rookie linebacker, will be expected to contribute

as well.

The Cardinals hope Breaston will give them a legitimate return threat. He was dangerous in that role at Michigan, and the job is his to lose. Receiver Michael Spurlock is another option. He is very quick and can make people miss in the open field. **GRADE: C-**

## BOTTOM LINE

This Cardinals have plenty of firepower on offense and a new coach who knows how to use it. But with the uncertainty in the offensive line, the need for more playmakers on defense and concerns about depth in many spots, it could be premature to expect a breakthrough season.

This team might have to settle for moderate improvement to say, 7-9, and then build for a playoff run in 2008. **SN**

*Kent Somers covers the Cardinals for the Arizona Republic.*

## PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

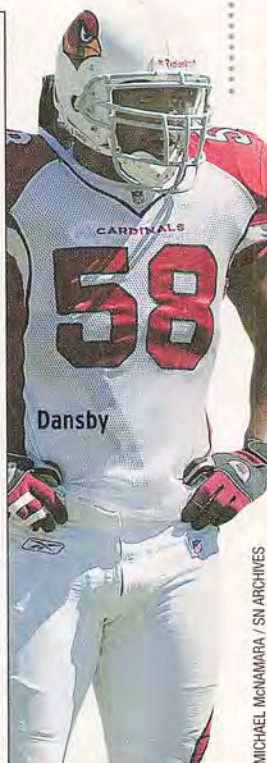
OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
QB ■ Matt Leinart	■ Kurt Warner	LE ■ Darnell Dockett	□ Chris Cooper
FB ■ Terrelle Smith	■ John Bronson	NT ■ Alan Branch	■ Kendrick Clancy
RB ▲ Edgerrin James	■ Marcel Shipp	RE ■ Antonio Smith	□ Chris Cooper
WR ▲ Anquan Boldin	■ Bryant Johnson	OLB ■ Chike Okefor	■ Calvin Pace
WR ▲ Larry Fitzgerald	□ LeRon McCoy	ILB ■ Gerald Hayes	■ Monty Beisel
TE ■ Leonard Pope	□ Alex Shor	ILB ■ Karlos Dansby	■ Monty Beisel
LT ■ Mike Gandy	□ Oliver Ross	OLB ■ Bertrand Berry	■ Calvin Pace
LG ■ Reggie Wells	■ Mike Gandy	LCB ■ Antrel Rolle	□ Eric Green
C ■ Al Johnson	■ Nick Leckey	SS ▲ Adrian Wilson	■ Aaron Francisco
RG ■ Deuce Lutui	□ Milford Brown	FS ■ Terrence Holt	■ Aaron Francisco
RT ■ Levi Brown	□ Brandon Gorin	RCB ■ Roderick Hood	■ Eric Green

## SPECIALISTS

K ■ Neil Rackers	KR ■ Steve Breaston
P ■ Scott Player	PR ■ Steve Breaston
	LS ▲ Nathan Hodel

▲ Elite ■ Solid ● Adequate □ Fringe

Depth charts updated weekly at [sportingnews.com](http://sportingnews.com)



## CARDINALS ROSTER

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL exp.	College	How acq.	2006 GP/GS
QUARTERBACKS							
9	Shane Boyd	6-1/232	9/18/82	1	Kentucky	FA/06	0/0
7	Matt Leinart	6-5/230	5/11/83	2	USC	D1/06	12/11
13	Kurt Warner	6-2/222	6/22/71	10	Northern Iowa	FA/05	7/5
RUNNING BACKS							
28	J.J. Arrington	5-9/214	1/23/83	3	California	D2/05	16/0
30	Obafemi Ayanbadejo (FB)	6-2/231	3/5/75	10	San Diego St.	FA/04	14/0
32	Edgerrin James	6-0/220	8/1/78	9	Miami (Fla.)	FA/06	16/16
44	A.J. Schable (FB)	6-3/281	5/18/84	2	South Dakota	FA/06	11/0
31	Marcel Shipp	5-11/230	8/8/78	7	Massachusetts	FA/01	15/0
45	Terrelle Smith (FB)	6-0/246	3/12/78	8	Arizona State	FA/07	16/8
RECEIVERS							
81	Anquan Boldin	6-1/218	10/3/80	5	Florida State	D2/03	16/16
18	Steve Breaston	6-0/193	8/20/83	R	Michigan	D5/07	—
39	John Bronson (TE)	6-3/275	7/8/82	3	Penn State	FA/05	2/0
11	Larry Fitzgerald	6-3/223	8/31/83	4	Pittsburgh	D1/04	13/13
80	Bryant Johnson	6-3/216	3/7/81	5	Penn State	D1a/03	16/8
19	LeRon McCoy	6-1/219	1/24/82	3	Indiana (Pa.)	D7/05	0/0
87	Sean Morey	5-11/200	2/26/76	6	Brown	FA/07	16/0
89	Ben Patrick (TE)	6-4/270	8/23/84	R	Delaware	D7/07	—
82	Leonard Pope (TE)	6-8/265	9/9/83	2	Georgia	D3/06	16/6
49	Alex Shor (TE)	6-7/250	1/29/83	1	Syracuse	FA/07	0/0
14	Todd Watkins	6-2/191	6/22/83	2	BYU	D7/06	0/0
OFFENSIVE LINEMEN							
61	Elton Brown (G)	6-5/340	5/22/82	3	Virginia	D4/05	0/0
75	Levi Brown (T)	6-5/323	3/16/84	R	Penn State	D1/07	—
67	Milford Brown (G)	6-5/331	8/15/80	6	Florida State	FA/06	13/12
69	Mike Gandy (G/T)	6-4/310	1/3/79	7	Notre Dame	FA/07	16/16
72	Brandon Gorin (T)	6-6/308	7/17/78	7	Purdue	FA/06	0/0
48	Nathan Hodel (LS)	6-2/242	11/12/77	6	Illinois	FA/02	16/0
50	Al Johnson (C)	6-5/296	1/27/79	4	Wisconsin	FA/07	16/0
60	Nick Leckey (C)	6-3/286	3/12/82	4	Kansas State	D6/04	14/11
76	Taitusi Lutui (G)	6-4/338	5/5/83	2	USC	D2/06	15/9
73	Qasim Mitchell (T)	6-5/347	12/3/79	5	North Carolina A&T	FA/07	0/0
79	Oliver Ross (T)	6-4/327	9/27/74	9	Iowa State	FA/05	11/5
74	Reggie Wells (G/C)	6-4/323	11/3/80	5	Clarion	D6a/03	16/16
DEFENSIVE LINEMEN							
91	Rodney Bailey (E)	6-3/306	10/7/79	7	Ohio State	FA/07	12/0
78	Alan Branch (NT)	6-5/324	12/29/84	R	Michigan	D2/07	—
70	Kendrick Clancy (NT)	6-1/305	9/17/78	8	Mississippi	FA/06	11/11
93	Chris Cooper (E)	6-5/285	12/27/77	7	Nebraska-Omaha	FA/06	13/0
90	Darnell Dockett (E)	6-4/290	5/27/81	4	Florida State	D3/04	16/16
96	Ross Kolodziej (T)	6-3/292	5/11/78	7	Wisconsin	FA/04	0/0
63	Jonathan Lewis (T)	6-1/312	7/12/84	2	Virginia Tech	D6/06	4/0
94	Antonio Smith (E)	6-3/274	10/21/81	3	Oklahoma State	D5/04	16/8
71	Joe Tafoya (E)	6-4/265	9/6/78	7	Arizona	FA/07	13/0
98	Gabe Watson (NT)	6-3/335	9/24/83	2	Michigan	D4/06	12/5
LINEBACKERS							
52	Monty Beisel	6-3/238	8/20/78	7	Kansas State	FA/06	8/2
92	Bertrand Berry	6-3/275	8/15/75	10	Notre Dame	FA/04	10/10
55	Darryl Blackstock	6-3/238	5/30/83	3	Virginia	D3b/05	16/1
58	Karlos Dansby	6-4/243	11/3/81	4	Auburn	D2/04	14/10
53	Buster Davis	5-9/239	10/20/83	R	Florida State	D3/07	—
54	Gerald Hayes	6-1/253	10/10/80	5	Pittsburgh	D3/03	14/14
59	Brandon Johnson	6-5/227	5/5/83	2	Louisville	D5/06	3/0
56	Chike Okefor	6-5/265	3/27/76	9	Purdue	FA/05	16/5
97	Calvin Pace	6-4/272	10/28/80	5	Wake Forest	D1b/03	16/5
DEFENSIVE BACKS							
20	Ralph Brown (CB)	5-10/185	9/16/78	8	Nebraska	FA/07	16/4
47	Aaron Francisco (S)	6-2/212	7/5/83	3	Brigham Young	FA/05	16/2
25	Eric Green (CB)	5-11/198	3/16/82	3	Virginia Tech	D3a/05	15/8
42	Terrence Holt (S)	6-2/208	3/5/80	5	N.C. State	FA/07	16/15
26	Roderick Hood (CB)	5-11/196	10/3/81	5	Auburn	FA/03	10/5
23	Darrell Hunter (CB)	6-0/206	11/29/83	2	Miami (OH)	FA/06	3/0
37	Hanik Milligan (S)	6-3/200	11/3/79	4	Houston	FA/06	16/0
21	Antrel Rolle (CB)	6-0/208	12/16/82	3	Miami	D1/05	16/16
22	Matt Ware (CB)	6-2/210	12/2/82	4	UCLA	W-Phi/06	14/1
24	Adrian Wilson (S)	6-3/230	10/12/79	7	N.C. State	D3/01	16/16
SPECIALISTS							
10	Scott Player (P)	6-1/206	12/17/69	10	Florida State	FA/98	16/0
1	Neil Rackers (K)	6-1/212	8/16/76	8	Illinois	FA/03	15/0

MICHAEL MONAMARA / SN ARCHIVES

Abbreviations: D1-draft pick, first round; W-claimed on waivers; T-obtained in trade; FA-free-agent acquisition.



# FALCONS

**With sweeping changes under way, don't look for the Falcons to fly high in the immediate future**

**SN PICK** 3rd, NFC South (5-11)

By D. ORLANDO LEDBETTER

Just three seasons ago, the Falcons were one step away from the Super Bowl under first-year coach Jim Mora. But on the heels of back-to-back second half collapses, owner Arthur Blank fired Mora and turned to another first-time NFL head coach, Bobby Petrino, to return the team to title contender status.

"Bobby Petrino is a difference-maker who will bring a strong identity to the Falcons," Blank says.

Whether Petrino can make a difference right away is unclear. His only previous experience in the league was a three-year stint as an assistant with the Jaguars. His challenge

will be to convince a skeptical locker room that his schemes will not only work against UAB and Syracuse but against the Panthers and Saints.

The transformation is going to take time. Between the overhaul on offense and the holes left to fill on defense—the most gaping of which are in the secondary—the Falcons likely will struggle this season.

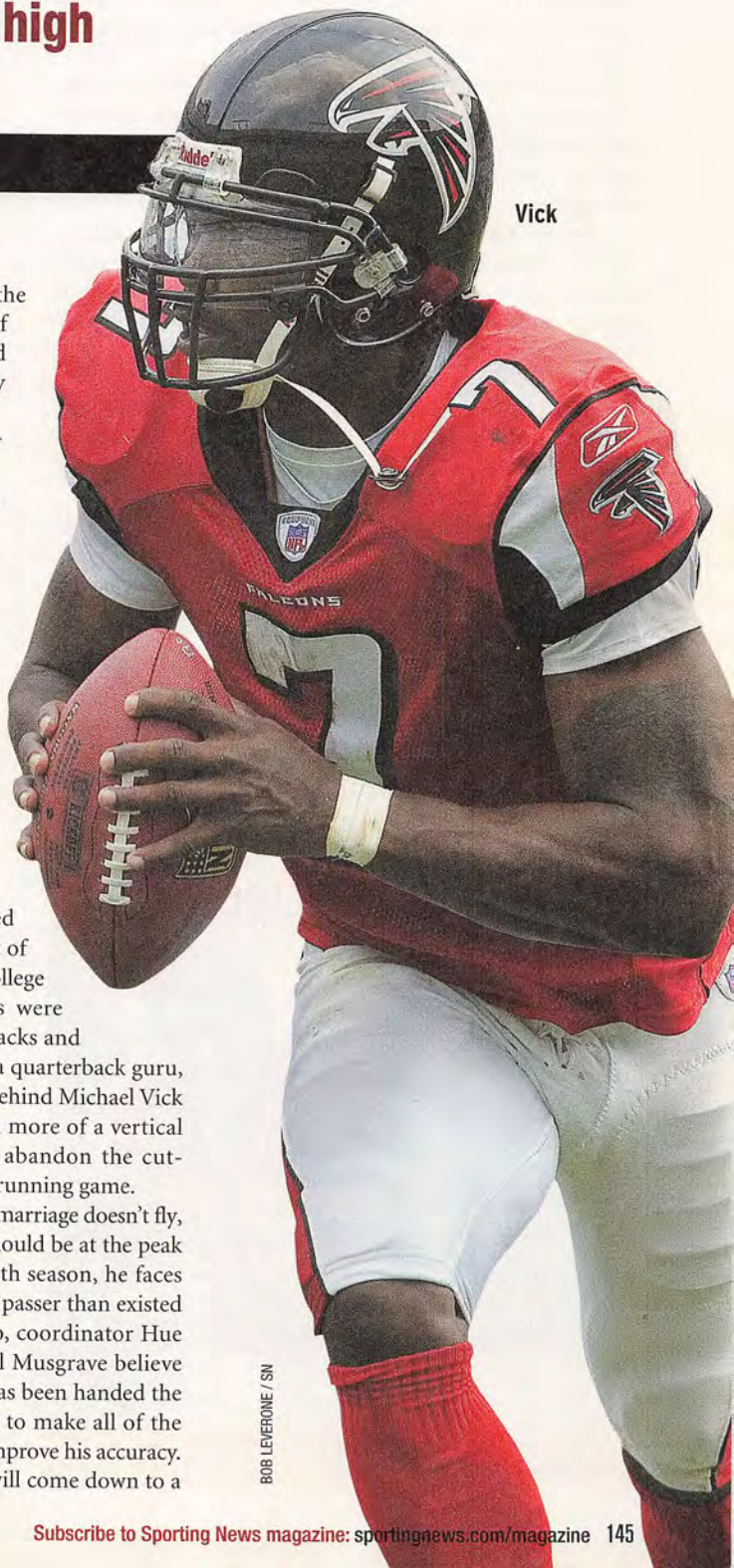
## OFFENSE

At Louisville, Petrino's dogged preparation and dazzling assortment of formations and shifts kept the best college defenses out of sync. His offenses were known for their efficient passing attacks and ability to put up points. Considered a quarterback guru, Petrino has thrown his full support behind Michael Vick but will demand greater accuracy in more of a vertical passing attack. The team also will abandon the cut-blocking scheme in favor of a power running game.

**Quarterbacks**—If the Vick-Petrino marriage doesn't fly, the Falcons will be in trouble. Vick should be at the peak of his career, but entering his seventh season, he faces more questions about his ability as a passer than existed when he entered the league. Petrino, coordinator Hue Jackson and quarterbacks coach Bill Musgrave believe they have the answers for Vick. He has been handed the keys to the car and will be expected to make all of the calls, audibles and throws, as well as improve his accuracy.

The No. 2 quarterback job likely will come down to a

Vick



BOB LEVERONE / SN

## SCHEDULE

All times Eastern

Sept. 9	at Minnesota	1:00
Sept. 16	at Jacksonville	1:00
Sept. 23	CAROLINA	4:15
Sept. 30	HOUSTON	1:00
Oct. 7	at Tennessee	1:00
Oct. 15	N.Y. GIANTS*	8:30
Oct. 21	at New Orleans	1:00
Oct. 28	Open date	
Nov. 4	SAN FRANCISCO	1:00
Nov. 11	at Carolina	1:00
Nov. 18	TAMPA BAY	1:00
Nov. 22	INDIANAPOLIS†	8:15
Dec. 2	at St. Louis	1:00
Dec. 10	NEW ORLEANS*	8:30
Dec. 16	at Tampa Bay	1:00
Dec. 23	at Arizona	4:05
Dec. 30	SEATTLE	1:00

Strength of schedule: T-27th

\*Monday †Thursday

Analysis of every Falcons game:  
sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom

## REGULAR-SEASON WINS



battle between Joey Harrington and D.J. Shockley. Harrington, the third overall pick in 2002, flopped as a starter in Detroit and Miami, where he had trouble making good reads. The hope is that Petrino and Musgrave can teach him to play within his skill set. Shockley has an unorthodox delivery but enough poise to step in and play. **GRADE: B**

**Running backs**—There will be some adjustments as the team moves away from the cut-blocking scheme that allowed it to lead the NFL in rushing the past three seasons. But the backs likely won't have too much trouble with the switch, which will require them to make fewer reads and rely more on instincts. There will be more straight-ahead runs and fewer stretch runs and toss sweeps.

Although Warrick Dunn turned in his third straight 1,000-yard season, he showed signs of slowing down as the year wore on and scored only four touchdowns. Dunn, 32, has proved he can carry the full load but appears ready for a time-share arrangement with second-year back Jerious Norwood.

Norwood showed the ability to break long runs and catch the ball out of the backfield as a rookie. He needs to be more durable and improve his open-field awareness for avoiding tacklers. Jamal Robertson is quick and runs low to the ground but will have to earn the No. 3 job.

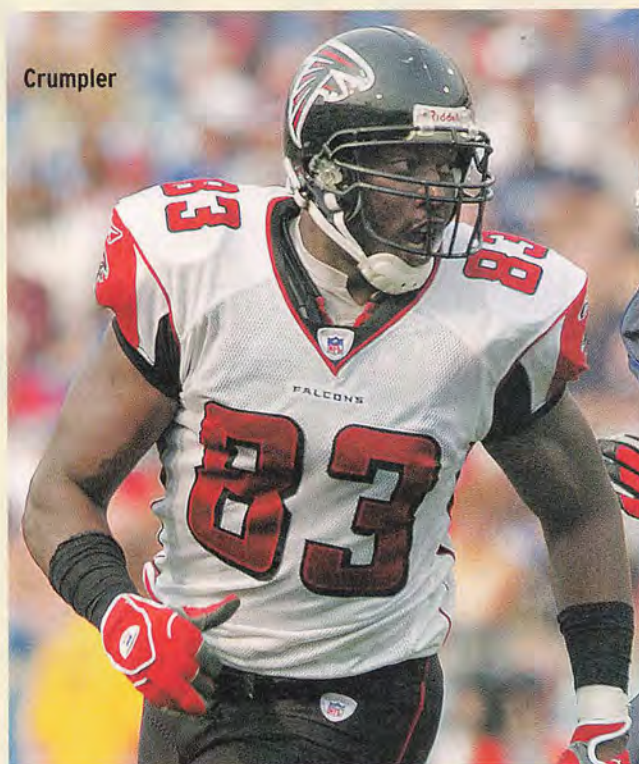
Fullback Ovie Mughelli, a free-agent pickup, will be a good lead escort for Dunn and Norwood. Mughelli has good size and strength, with the athleticism to make blocks at the second level. Rookie Jason Snelling, a punishing lead blocker, could earn the backup job. **GRADE: B+**

**Receivers**—It's the same old story: Inconsistency and drops plague this unit. The Falcons haven't given up on Michael Jenkins and Roddy White, but neither has delivered the playmaking payoff the team envisioned when it made them first-round picks. Jenkins needs to become more aggressive battling for balls in the air; White has to work on holding onto the ball, among other things.

The Falcons hope free-agent signee Joe Horn will help their young receivers add some needed swagger to their games. Horn has more career receptions (576) and touchdown catches (57)

## SCOUTING REPORTS: OFFENSE

Crumpler



DAVID DUROCHIK FOR SN

### Michael Vick, QB

**Strengths:** Has a cannon for an arm and can make any throw. Displays top-notch elusiveness and running skills. Excels at buying second chances. Throws downfield effectively while on the run.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks the height to see the field well from the pocket. Does not always go through his progressions. Locks on to his primary receiver and scrambles if he's not open. Has inconsistent mechanics.

**Bottom line:** Vick improved some as a passer last season, but he remains a quarterback who is an athlete first. Until Vick learns to go through his progressions and make plays with his arm in the Falcons' new system, he'll be out of his element.

**Grade: 8.4**

### Warrick Dunn, RB

**Strengths:** Has excellent vision and patience. Runs with good burst and great balance. Excels on cutback runs. Shows a second gear in the open field. Rarely drops passes.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal bulk. Won't push the pile or regularly pick up tough yards in short-yardage situations.

**Bottom line:** Quick and tough, Dunn is

a solid starter who understands how to play the game. **Grade: 7.6**

### Jerious Norwood, RB

**Strengths:** A speed back who explodes through holes. Makes defenders miss at the second level. A home run threat. Runs low and fights for yardage after contact. Has good hands as a receiver.

**Weaknesses:** Must add bulk and lower-body strength. Doesn't always wait long enough for holes to develop. Can get beat as a blocker; must improve his technique. Needs to run sharper pass routes.

**Bottom line:** Like Dunn, Norwood lacks the size to be an every-down back. But in the Falcons' two-back system, he has the speed and toughness to be a playmaker. **Grade: 6.9**

### Joe Horn, WR

**Strengths:** Explodes off the line with power. A precise route runner who gets in and out of his breaks quickly and gets good separation. Catches anything reasonably close to him and makes plays over the middle in traffic. Uses his quickness and hands to break press coverage.

**Weaknesses:** Somewhat inconsistent; can be streaky when his number isn't getting called. Occasionally will lose

## FANTASY SOURCE PICKS

### STUMBLER ▶

RB Warrick Dunn

### ON THE RISE

RB Jerious Norwood

### MR. RELIABLE

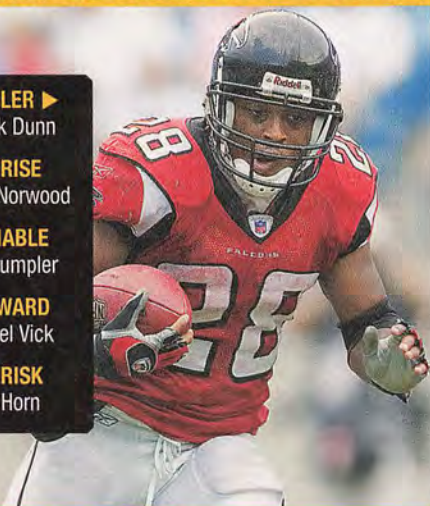
TE Alge Crumpler

### RISK/REWARD

QB Michael Vick

### INJURY RISK

WR Joe Horn



BOB LEVERONE / SN

Fantasy Source Football is your online fantasy authority. Go to [fantasy.sportingnews.com/nfl](http://fantasy.sportingnews.com/nfl).

Players are graded by War Room scouts on a 1-10 scale.

\*Rookies (not graded)

focus and drift in his routes. Has durability issues. Not the deep threat he once was.

**Bottom line:** Horn will add some much-needed leadership to an inconsistent receiving unit. If he stays healthy, he will be a big help to Michael Vick. **Grade: 7.0**

#### ↑ Michael Jenkins, WR

**Strengths:** Has good size, speed and leaping ability. A smooth route runner who can get separation against man coverage. Catches passes away from his frame.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal initial quickness. Not physical enough; can get muscled off his routes. Lacks ideal recognition skills and fails to find holes against zones. Loses focus.

**Bottom line:** Jenkins needs to be more aggressive but has the tools to become a good starter. **Grade: 6.7**

#### ↓ Alge Crumpler, TE

**Strengths:** Has an excellent combination of size, speed and agility. Changes direction well and bursts out of his cuts. Excels against man coverage and finds soft spots in zones. Can make catches in traffic. Has good hands and the frame to shield defenders. A nice red zone threat.

**Weaknesses:** Runs choppy routes. Not a power blocker; lacks the ability to sustain blocks.

**Bottom line:** Crumpler is Michael Vick's go-to guy and remains the top receiving threat in the Falcons' offense. **Grade: 8.7**

#### Todd Weiner, T

**Strengths:** Moves well laterally and can get to the second level. Sets quickly and prevents penetration. Forces edge rushers wide. Has a strong initial punch and a nonstop motor. Rarely loses once locked on. Durable.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks strength and can be overpowered at the line. Susceptible to bull rushes. Struggles to anchor. Plays with a narrow base on drive blocks.

**Bottom line:** A sound technician, Weiner does his job and understands how to play the game. **Grade: 7.5**

#### Wayne Gandy, T

**Strengths:** Has a good first step in pass protection. Shows good pocket awareness and forces speed rushers wide. Gets great pop. Rarely plays off-balance.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks lower-body strength. Tends to come off high in the running game and struggles to move opponents. Has difficulty resetting his feet against inside moves. Inconsistent.

**Bottom line:** Gandy is a durable veteran who is productive in the passing game. He was a solid addition to the Falcons' line last season. **Grade: 6.9**

#### ↑ Kynan Forney, G

**Strengths:** Plays with good balance and a nonstop motor. Has the burst to reach second-level blocks. Shows nice lateral mobility and typically gets good position. Effective on pulls and traps. Sets quickly and adjusts to stunts and blitzes.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks in-line power and has inconsistent technique. Takes too many false steps. Won't wear down defenders or push the pile. Struggles with bull rushers.

**Bottom line:** Forney is a very good athlete and a high-effort player. He is expected to return to a starting role after missing the end of the 2006 season with a shoulder injury. **Grade: 7.6**

#### \*Justin Blalock, G

**Strengths:** Has nice size and the power to drive opponents off the line. Fires off at the snap and has excellent speed and athleticism.

**Weaknesses:** Relies too much on his natural strength and needs to improve his footwork and technique. Struggles to maintain blocks in pass protection.

**Bottom line:** Blalock played mostly tackle in college but is best suited for guard in the NFL and is a good fit in the Falcons' new scheme.

#### Todd McClure, C

**Strengths:** Shows a good burst to the second level. Has nice footwork and adjusts to moving targets. Sets quickly and rarely allows defenders to shoot gaps. Uses his hands fairly well. Shows good awareness and gives guards excellent help. Makes smart line calls.

**Weaknesses:** Undersized and lacks power. Struggles against massive two-gap defenders. Won't push the pile and must play with perfect technique against bull rushers.

**Bottom line:** McClure overcomes his limited size and strength with athleticism and quickness. He is a mainstay in the middle of the Falcons' line. **Grade: 7.3**

**KEY:** ↑ Ascending ↓ Descending

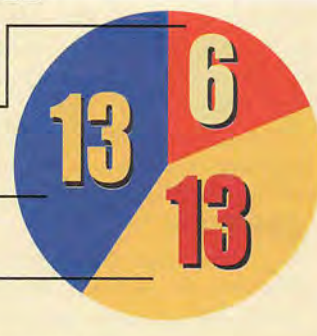
## INSIDERS POLL

### Bobby Petrino will:

Help Michael Vick achieve his potential

Discover Vick already has achieved his potential

Wish he'd hung on to Matt Schaub



Based on a poll of SN's 32 team correspondents

## BOLD PREDICTIONS

**1** QB Michael Vick will shock the league by completing more than 60 percent of his passes in Bobby Petrino's vertical passing attack. Vick's receivers will stop dropping the ball after a veteran is cut in Week 1 because of a dropped pass.

**2** RB Warrick Dunn will hit the wall, and Jerious Norwood will show he isn't ready to carry the full load. As a result, the NFL's top running game over the past three years will disintegrate.

**3** Keith Brooking will get over his permanent move to middle linebacker and turn in an impact season.

than the Falcons' other top receivers—Jenkins, White and Brian Finneran—combined. Team officials hope Horn, 35, is over the hamstring injuries that slowed him the past two seasons with the Saints.

Finneran suffered a setback in his recovery from a severe knee injury, and his status is uncertain. That could give speedy third-round pick Laurent Robinson a better shot to contribute.

Although tight end Alge Crumpler led the team in receptions in 2006, he must step up his game after a season in which he, too, dropped passes. The Falcons are high on backups Daniel Fells, a solid route runner and receiver, and Dwayne Blakley, who has nice hands and could be used more in the red zone.

### GRADE: C

**Line**—Petrino wants this unit to be bigger as he switches to a more conventional power blocking strategy. The only problem is center Todd McClure, right guard Kynan Forney and right tackle Todd Weiner—three small, quick blockers—all were signed to contract extensions before Petrino was hired.

Though the linemen will need to learn new techniques in terms of run blocking, they'll be asked to make even bigger strides in pass protection. The unit gave up 47 sacks last season, and left tackle Wayne Gandy, in particular, got beat by speed rushers more as the season wore on. The linemen will be asked to protect for longer periods of time in the vertical passing attack.

Gandy, who is stout enough in the running game, apparently will be working with a rookie—second-rounder Justin Blalock—on the left side. The Falcons like Blalock's size (6-3, 320) and ability to anchor in pass protection. To keep the spot,

Blalock will have to hold off Tionu Fonoti (6-4, 350), who could be a powerful run blocker, and Tyson Clabo, who has the size (6-6, 314) to flourish.

The right side of the line—Weiner and Forney—might be stronger than the left in run blocking, though Forney is recovering from offseason shoulder surgery. McClure is a dependable mauler in the middle.

Tackle Quinn Ojinnaka is a promising young backup. Ojinnaka is extremely athletic, but his power will be tested in new scheme. **GRADE: C-**

## DEFENSE

New coordinator Mike Zimmer, who ran the Cowboys' defense the past seven years, is a flexible tactician who gets his playmakers in position to make the greatest impact. The team will stick with a 4-3 scheme, but Zimmer has a mandate from Petrino to take a more aggressive approach. Look for top athletes such as right end John Abraham, linebackers Keith Brooking and Michael Boley and cornerback DeAngelo Hall to be turned loose. As a whole, the defense's strength lies against the run; the secondary still has issues.

**Line**—Health will play a huge role in the performance of this unit. The Falcons need Abraham and tackle Rod Coleman at full strength to fortify the right side of the line and boost the pass rush.

Coleman ruptured his right quadriceps in late April and may not be fully recovered by Week 1. That could be a big problem because he's one of the game's best inside bull rushers when healthy.

The troubles at tackle don't end with Coleman. Jonathan Babineaux, a stout run player who's first in line to fill Coleman's spot, may face a suspension because of off-field legal issues. That could force the team to rush sixth-round pick Trey Lewis onto the field at nose tackle. Lewis is a good bull rusher but faces a big transition from the Division II ranks.

At the other tackle spot, incumbent starter Grady Jackson's future with the Falcons is in jeopardy because of a contract dispute. Although Anthony Bryant is a run stuffer in the mold of Jackson, he isn't as accomplished at the job. Darrell Shropshire, who is scrappy but must play with greater discipline, is another option.

Abraham, who was hampered by injuries

## SECRET WEAPON

### CHRIS HOUSTON, CB

Houston made a name for himself at Arkansas by shutting down some of the nation's top receivers, including USC's Dwayne Jarrett and LSU's Dwayne Bowe. The Falcons like his man-to-man skills and strength, and they're confident he'll prove capable of making plays in zone coverage despite his lack of experience.



## SCOUTING REPORTS: DEFENSE

### ↓ John Abraham, E

**Strengths:** Has great athletic ability. Uses his hands well. Takes good angles to the ball and is relentless in pursuit. Can beat most linemen with his first step. Shows excellent closing speed to the quarterback. Changes directions quickly and tips passes.

**Weaknesses:** Overaggressive; creates running lanes by getting too far upfield. Doesn't have pass-rush moves. Lacks bulk for an end and gets engulfed at times.

**Bottom line:** Abraham is an explosive playmaker who gets into the backfield to disrupt plays. However, teams have success running at him, and his durability is a major concern. **Grade: 8.3**

### \* Jamaal Anderson, E

**Strengths:** Very productive pass rusher when aggressive. Can beat blockers inside or outside. Has surprising speed in pursuit. Delivers a blow as a tackler.

**Weaknesses:** Sometimes loses focus and plays too upright against the run. Lacks great initial quickness.

**Bottom line:** Anderson may need a year or two of seasoning to reach his potential, but he has the tools to be dominant.

### ↓ Rod Coleman, T

**Strengths:** Has excellent initial quickness, lateral mobility and closing speed. Blows up plays in the backfield. Plays with good leverage and has the upper-body strength to maintain separation. Gets through traffic quickly and shows good range. Has effective rip and swim moves.

**Weaknesses:** Undersized. Creates running lanes by trying to avoid blockers. Can't stack blockers at the point of attack.

**Bottom line:** Coleman, who still is recovering from a ruptured quadriceps, isn't a powerhouse run stuffer, but he makes plays with his quickness and is the NFL's best interior pass rusher. **Grade: 8.8**

### Anthony Bryant, T

**Strengths:** Has the massive frame and lower-body strength to hold up at the point of attack as an effective run stopper. Can be a factor with improved conditioning.

**Weaknesses:** Not a quick-twitch player. Struggles with the mental parts of the game.

**Bottom line:** Bryant isn't a good fit in the Falcons' attacking-style defense, but he may be able to help as a run stuffer. **Grade: 5.4**

### Keith Brooking, LB

**Strengths:** Plays with good leverage. Delivers a powerful punch and sheds blocks quickly. Has sideline-to-sideline range and the burst to recover from false steps. Gets to the quarterback on the blitz. A powerful tackler. Has good instincts in zone coverage and can cover most backs man-to-man.

**Weaknesses:** Can be overaggressive and undisciplined; occasionally gets caught out of position. Sometimes tackles too high, overruns holes or attacks the wrong shoulder of lead blockers.

**Bottom line:** Aside from his overaggressiveness, Brooking has few weaknesses. He can make plays as a run stuffer, pass rusher or ballhawk in coverage. **Grade: 8.0**

### Demorrio Williams, LB

**Strengths:** An explosive player who can shoot gaps. Has good closing speed. Reads keys quickly and takes good angles. Covers a lot of ground in zone coverage. Wraps up well on tackles.

**Weaknesses:** Undersized and lacks ideal power. Can be engulfed. Doesn't anchor well or shed blocks quickly. Lacks pass-rush moves. Needs to get stronger.

**Bottom line:** Williams has the athletic ability to be an every-down linebacker, but he could be slowed by a torn pectoral muscle. **Grade: 7.3**

### ↑ Michael Boley, LB

**Strengths:** Has very good speed and quickness. Sheds blocks effectively. Plays hard and throws his body around. Has good range in coverage.

**Weaknesses:** Can be overaggressive. Needs to improve at dropping into coverage. Doesn't stay on his feet in traffic.

**Bottom line:** Boley earned a starting nod in 2006 and emerged as a playmaker who can rush the passer and is effective in coverage. **Grade: 6.5**

### DeAngelo Hall, CB

**Strengths:** Has ideal speed, quickness and fluidity for the position. Explodes out of his cuts and has a second gear.



## SCOUT TAKES

## A scout from another team sizes up the Falcons

**DeAngelo Hall** is right on the edge of becoming an elite cornerback. A lot of personnel directors would rank him in the top five in the league. ... They'll miss **Patrick Kerney** tremendously—not just his talent on the field but also his leadership. Luckily for them, they were able to move up to the eighth spot overall to get **Jamaal Anderson**. He will help lessen Kerney's loss. ... **Joe Horn** may not have the second gear he used to have, but he's still a smart route runner who knows how to get open. Having him there should help **Michael Jenkins** and **Roddy White** become correct route runners and help them ascend. ... What **Bobby Petrino** has done is come in and say, "We're going to refocus on running the football—and we're going to do it a different way. We're going to outmuscle you and overpower you."



Jenkins

DAVID DUROCHIK FOR SN

last season, provides speed and power off the edge and is a terror running down plays from the back side. First-round pick Jamaal Anderson is expected to fill the left end vacancy created by Patrick Kerney's free-agent departure. Anderson needs to improve his lower-body strength to be more effective against the run, but he shows great promise as a speed rusher and had 13½ sacks last season.

Chauncey Davis could challenge Anderson for the starting job; otherwise, he'll be the top backup at both end spots. Davis has been solid against the run but isn't a threat on passing downs. Paul Carrington could stick and be used as a designated pass rusher. **GRADE: C+**

**Linebackers**—The coaches want this unit to provide more explosiveness and improve its coverage drops, particularly when the team plays zone.

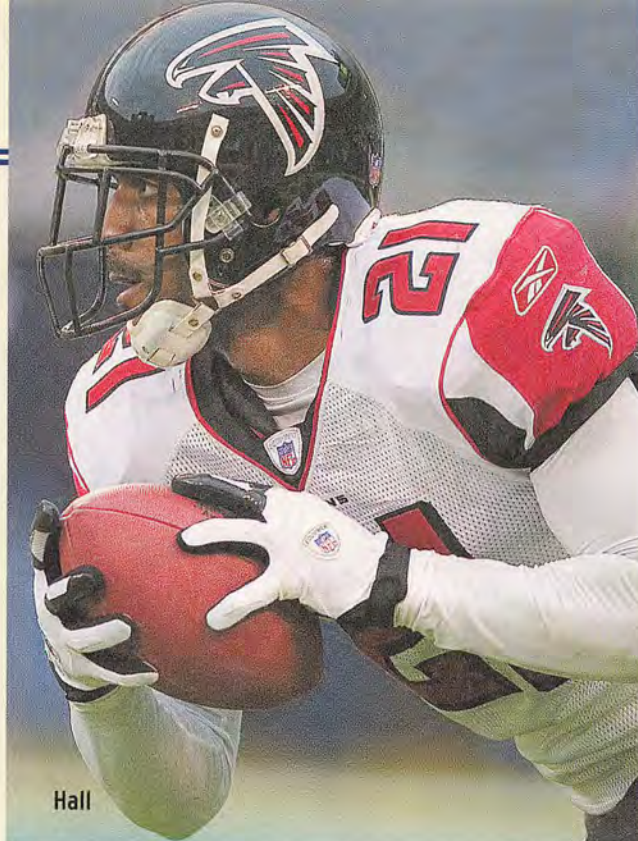
Brooking will be asked to play middle linebacker rather than his preferred spot on the weak side. Brooking has great speed and always is around the ball, but he needs to make more impact plays near the line.

With Brooking in the middle, the team had hoped Demorrio Williams, who has the speed to drop in coverage and blitz, could shine at weakside linebacker. But that plan sustained a setback when Williams tore a pectoral muscle in the offseason. If he's not healthy when the season begins, rookie Stephen Nicholas probably will start. Nicholas is a tackling machine but will have to learn how to drop into coverage.

Boley is a rising star on the strong side. A great athlete, he was used at end in passing situations last season but his role will be simplified to help maximize his talent.

Backup middle linebacker Jordan Beck is ready for more action. Beck is a little short but has some serious pop as a hitter. **GRADE: B+**

**Secondary**—Zimmer once was a defensive backs coach for



Hall

BOB LEVERONE / SN

Has solid recognition skills. Shows good instincts and range in zone coverage. Has nice ball skills and the leaping ability to compete for jump balls.

**Weaknesses:** Plays with inconsistent technique and doesn't press receivers effectively. Doesn't always fight through blocks or wrap up on tackles. Has had durability issues.

**Bottom line:** Hall has become one of the NFL's best corners and will be the main man in the Falcons' secondary for years to come. **Grade: 9.0**

## \*Chris Houston, CB

**Strengths:** Has the speed to cover receivers tightly all over the field in man coverage. Can jam receivers with a hard punch and slow their release. Shows an explosive burst to come underneath receivers and make interceptions.

**Weaknesses:** Gets beaten by quick open-field moves. Doesn't make many plays to break up passes and allows too many completions. Tends to stop his feet during his backpedal.

**Bottom line:** Houston would have benefited from another year in college to gain seasoning, but he has excellent physical tools and will be thrown into the starting mix early with the Falcons.

## ↓ Lawyer Milloy, S

**Strengths:** A physical presence over the middle in zone coverage. Has

good size and excellent strength. Separates receivers from the ball. Diagnoses the run quickly and takes great angles. Excels in lateral pursuit. Remains a solid open-field tackler.

**Weaknesses:** Has lost a step; limited in man coverage and has diminishing range in deep coverage. Lacks hip fluidity and recovery speed. Over-aggressive against the run. Has durability concerns.

**Bottom line:** Milloy's skills are beginning to decline, but when the front seven keep bodies off him, he still is an effective starter. **Grade: 6.8**

## Jimmy Williams, S

**Strengths:** Has great size and speed. A versatile playmaker who also can play corner. Physical; easily reroutes receivers. Uses his size effectively in the red zone. Shows fluid hips to turn and run with receivers. Aggressive in run support; fills hard and tackles well.

**Weaknesses:** Must improve his awareness in zone coverage. Gets caught peeking into the backfield against the run. Tends to lock on to the quarterback and must focus more on receivers. Attitude and effort can be problematic.

**Bottom line:** Williams was slow to adjust to the NFL game as a rookie cornerback. He's expected to move to safety this season, which would help cover his weaknesses in coverage. **Grade: 6.2**

the Cowboys, and Deion Sanders vouches for him. That likely will carry weight with the team's young defensive backs, who need to boost their games.

That group includes Hall. Despite making the Pro Bowl for the second time last season, Hall was beaten far too often to lay claim to the title of "shutdown corner." But he has excellent tools and playmaking ability.

The Falcons are plugging second-round pick Chris Houston into the starting spot opposite Hall. Houston is a tough, physical player, but he will be targeted by opponents and could have trouble making the transition to NFL coverage schemes, particularly zones.

With Houston on board, Jimmy Williams, who had been slated to start at right cornerback, will switch to free safety. A hard hitter, Williams showed he has a long way to go in man coverage as a rookie corner.

Safeties Lawyer Milloy and Chris Crocker helped improve a porous run defense last season, but Crocker was lost in coverage, which is why Williams likely will replace him as the starter. Milloy, the other starter, played well last season but wasn't asked to cover much ground.

Crocker is expected to battle rookie David Irons for the nickel back role. Irons has some durability concerns but is a strong hitter with good man coverage skills. **GRADE: C**

## SPECIAL TEAMS

New special teams coach Jerry Rosburg expects his kickoff and punt coverage units to be aggressive. Beck and free-agent pickups Lewis Sanders and Marcus Wilkins give the team a trio of special teams studs who will get to the returner and deliver a shot.

The team has a capable punter in Michael Koenen, who also handles kickoffs and long field-goal attempts. But the team has a shaky situation with its primary kicker. Aaron Elling and Billy Cundiff are expected to compete for the job; both players are four years removed from their best NFL seasons. Suffice to say, the Falcons have Morten Andersen's phone number on speed dial.

Allen Rossum provides a steady return option, but he'll have to stave off challenges from players who likely would provide more help outside of special teams. If he shakes off past injury problems, Derrick Hamilton, a prolific return man in college, could be a cheap replacement. **GRADE: D**

## BOTTOM LINE

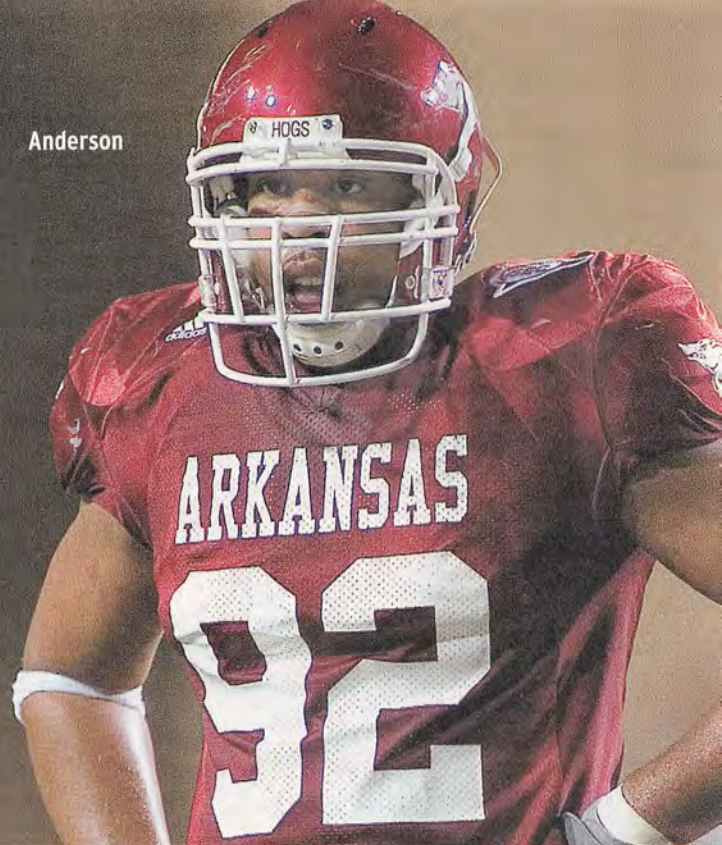
There isn't much evidence to suggest Petrino will be able to follow Mora's lead and guide the Falcons to the conference championship game in his first year. The truth is this team faces a major adjustment period under Petrino.

On offense, he has to hope Vick will make major improvement in accuracy even though the Falcons have a revamped line and a crew of receivers who drop balls like they are hot potatoes.

Injury problems already are cropping up on defense, and the secondary remains questionable. If the Falcons finish better than 6-10, Petrino deserves coach of the year votes. **SN**

*D. Orlando Ledbetter covers the Falcons for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution.*

Anderson



MATTHEW KUTZ / SN ARCHIVES

## KEY MOVES

### 2007 DRAFT PICKS

Rd.-Pick

**GRADE B+**

**1-8 Jamaal Anderson, DE, Arkansas**

Has big-play potential but needs better lower-body strength.

**2-39 Justin Blalock, G, Texas**

An agile and powerful blocker who could dominate inside.

**2-41 Chris Houston, CB, Arkansas**

Has great man-to-man skills but could be a liability in zones.

**3-75 Laurent Robinson, WR, Illinois State**

Has to get stronger but could be used in multiple-WR sets.

**4-109 Stephen Nicholas, OLB, South Florida**

Has great speed and striking ability.

**4-133 Martrez Milner, TE, Georgia**

Has good physical skills but needs to improve his concentration.

**6-185 Trey Lewis, NT, Washburn**

Good bull rusher; explosive in short area. Will play at nose tackle.

**6-194 David Irons, CB, Auburn**

Two major knee surgeries are worrisome, but he adds depth.

**6-198 Doug Datish, C, Ohio State**

Needs to get bigger but could help as the long snapper.

**6-203 Daren Stone, S, Maine**

A big hitter who could play on special teams and add depth at safety.

**7-244 Jason Snelling, FB, Virginia**

A punishing lead blocker who could contribute on special teams.

## VETERAN PLAYERS

**Additions:** G Tionu Fonoti (FA/Dolphins), QB Joey Harrington (FA/Dolphins), WR Joe Horn (FA/Saints), FB Ovie Mughelli (FA/Ravens), QB Chris Redman (FA/Titans), CB Lewis Sanders (FA/Texans), LB Marcus Wilkins (FA/Bengals).

**Losses:** C Ben Claxton (waivers/Raiders), FB Justin Griffith (FA/Raiders), LB Ed Hartwell (FA/Bengals), DE Patrick Kerney (FA/Seahawks), G Matt Lehr (FA/Buc-caneers), WR Ashley Lelie (FA/49ers), CB Kevin Mathis (FA), LB Ike Reese (FA), QB Matt Schaub (trade/Texans), CB Jason Webster (FA).

## STADIUM/MEDIA

Georgia Dome (71,228, artificial)

Tickets: 404-223-8444

Training camp: 4400 Falcon Parkway, Flowery Branch, GA; 770-965-2761

Radio: Z-93 (92.9 FM)

Website: atlantafalcons.com

## PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

## OFFENSE

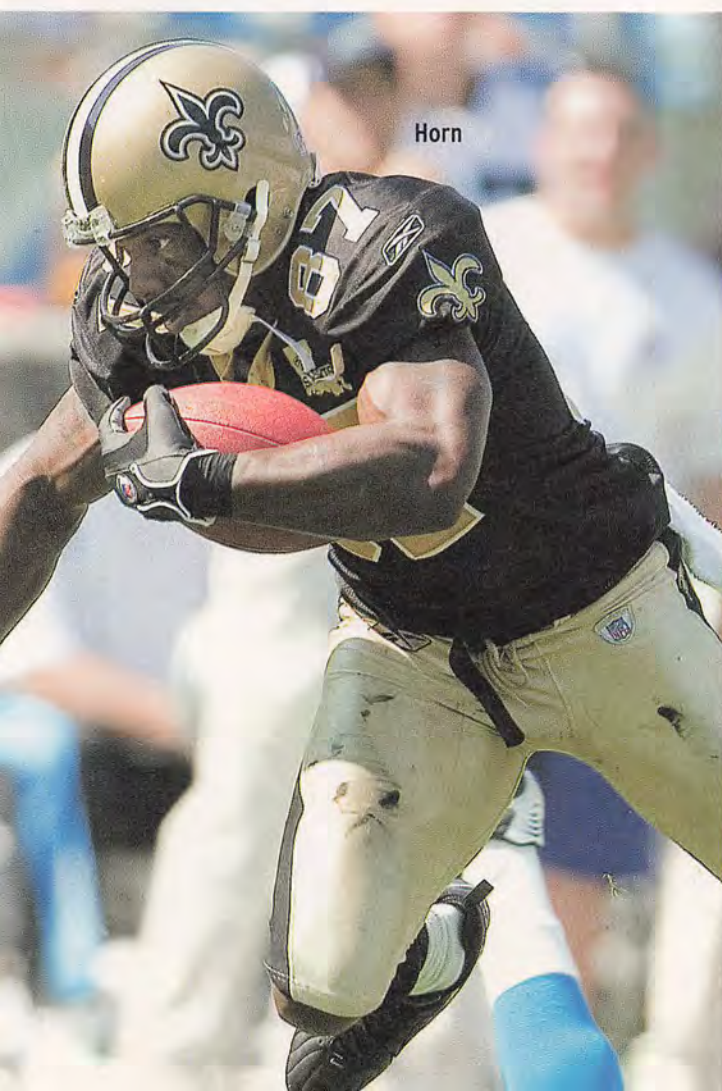
**QB** ■ Michael Vick  
● Joey Harrington  
**FB** ■ Ovie Mughelli  
□ Jason Snelling  
**RB** ■ Warrick Dunn  
■ Jerious Norwood  
**WR** ■ Joe Horn  
● Roddy White  
**WR** ● Michael Jenkins  
● Brian Finneran  
**TE** ▲ Alge Crumpler  
● Daniel Fells  
**LT** ● Wayne Gandy  
□ Frank Omiyale  
**LG** ● Justin Blalock  
□ Toniu Fonoti  
**C** ● Todd McClure  
● Doug Datish  
**RG** ■ Kynan Forney  
● Tyson Clabo  
**RT** ■ Todd Weiner  
● Quinn Ojinnaka

## DEFENSE

**LE** ■ Jamaal Anderson  
● Chauncey Davis  
**LT** ■ Grady Jackson  
● Anthony Bryant  
**RT** ▲ Rod Coleman  
● Jonathan Babineaux  
**RE** ▲ John Abraham  
□ Paul Carrington  
**SLB** ■ Michael Boley  
● Marcus Wilkins  
**MLB** ■ Keith Brooking  
● Jordan Beck  
**WLB** ● Demorrio Williams  
● Stephen Nicholas  
**LCB** ▲ DeAngelo Hall  
● Lewis Sanders  
**SS** ■ Lawyer Milloy  
● Daren Stone  
**FS** ● Jimmy Williams  
● Chris Crocker  
**RCB** ● Chris Houston  
● David Irons

## SPECIALISTS

**K** □ Aaron Elling **KR** ■ Allen Rossum  
**P** ■ Michael Koenen **PR** ■ Allen Rossum  
**LS** ● Boone Stutz  
▲ Elite ■ Solid  
● Adequate □ Fringe

Depth charts updated weekly at [sportingnews.com](http://sportingnews.com)

Horn

## FALCONS ROSTER

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL exp.	College	How acq.	2006 GP/GS
QUARTERBACKS							
13	Joey Harrington	6-4/220	10/21/78	7	Oregon	FA/07	11/11
8	Chris Redman	6-3/223	7/7/77	5	Louisville	FA/07	0/0
3	D.J. Shockley	6-1/214	3/25/83	2	Georgia	D7/06	0/0
7	Michael Vick	6-0/215	6/26/80	7	Virginia Tech	D1/01	16/16
RUNNING BACKS							
28	Warrick Dunn	5-9/180	1/5/75	11	Florida State	FA/02	16/16
38	Corey McIntyre (FB)	6-0/244	1/25/79	3	West Virginia	W-NO/06	4/0
34	Ovie Mughelli (FB)	6-1/255	6/10/80	5	Wake Forest	FA/07	16/8
32	Jerious Norwood	6-0/205	7/29/83	2	Mississippi State	D3/06	14/0
42	Jamal Robertson	5-10/215	1/10/77	5	Ohio Northern	FA/06	1/0
44	Jason Snelling	5-11/230	12/29/83	R	Virginia	D7/07	—
RECEIVERS							
85	Dwayne Blackley (TE)	6-4/257	8/10/79	4	Missouri	FA/04	16/4
83	Alge Crumpler (TE)	6-2/262	12/23/77	7	North Carolina	D2/01	16/16
18	Jamin Elliot	5-11/195	10/5/79	2	Delaware	FA/06	1/0
89	Daniel Fells (TE)	6-4/252	9/23/83	2	California	FA/06	0/0
86	Brian Finneran	6-5/210	1/31/76	9	Villanova	FA/00	0/0
15	Derrick Hamilton	6-4/207	11/30/81	3	Clemson	FA/07	0/0
87	Joe Horn	6-1/213	1/16/72	12	Itawamba JC	FA/07	10/9
12	Michael Jenkins	6-4/217	6/18/82	4	Ohio State	D1b/04	16/16
81	Adam Jennings	5-9/181	11/17/82	2	Fresno State	D6/06	15/0
88	Martez Milner (TE)	6-3/252	8/8/84	R	Georgia	D4b/07	—
19	Laurent Robinson	6-2/199	5/20/85	R	Illinois State	D3/07	—
84	Roddy White	6-0/204	11/2/81	3	UAB	D1/05	16/5
OFFENSIVE LINEMEN							
64	P.J. Alexander (G)	6-4/297	12/23/78	5	Syracuse	FA/06	4/4
63	Justin Blalock (G)	6-3/320	12/20/83	R	Texas	D2a/07	—
77	Tyson Clabo (G)	6-6/314	12/17/81	3	Wake Forest	FA/06	10/10
61	Doug Datish (C)	6-4/302	8/1/83	R	Ohio State	D6c/07	—
67	Brian Ferentz (C)	6-3/282	3/28/83	1	Iowa	FA/06	0/0
68	Toniu Fonoti (G)	6-4/350	11/26/81	6	Nebraska	FA/07	6/0
65	Kynan Forney (G)	6-3/307	9/8/78	7	Hawaii	D7b/01	7/7
72	Wayne Gandy (T)	6-4/315	2/10/71	14	Auburn	T-NO/06	16/16
	Leander Jordan (T)	6-4/316	9/15/77	8	Indiana (Pa.)	FA/07	0/0
68	Bo Lacy (T)	6-4/294	11/22/80	1	Arkansas	FA/07	0/0
62	Todd McClure (C)	6-1/286	2/16/77	9	LSU	D7a/99	16/16
76	Quinn Ojinnaka (T)	6-5/292	4/23/84	2	Syracuse	D5/06	11/0
70	Frank Omiyale (T)	6-4/310	11/23/82	3	Tennessee Tech	D5b/05	1/0
47	Boone Stutz (LS)	6-6/256	11/4/82	2	Wisconsin	FA/06	16/0
74	Todd Weiner (T)	6-4/297	9/16/75	10	Kansas State	FA/02	16/16
DEFENSIVE LINEMEN							
55	John Abraham (E)	6-4/256	5/6/78	8	South Carolina	T-NYJ/06	8/7
98	Jamaal Anderson (E)	6-5/288	2/6/86	R	Arkansas	D1/07	—
95	Jonathan Babineaux (T)	6-2/286	10/12/81	3	Iowa	D2/05	16/1
97	Anthony Bryant (T)	6-3/337	11/6/81	2	Alabama	FA/07	4/3
91	Paul Carrington (E)	6-7/260	11/10/82	2	Central Florida	FA/06	15/2
93	Nic Clemons (E)	6-6/298	2/3/80	2	Georgia	FA/07	0/0
75	Rod Coleman (T)	6-2/285	8/16/76	9	East Carolina	FA/04	15/15
92	Chauncey Davis (E)	6-2/274	1/27/83	3	Florida State	D4/05	16/14
90	Grady Jackson (T)	6-2/345	1/21/73	11	Knox	FA/06	16/15
99	Tommy Jackson (T)	6-1/311	12/12/83	2	Auburn	FA/06	5/0
67	Trey Lewis (T)	6-3/318	5/23/85	R	Washburn	D6a/07	—
94	Josh Mallard (E)	6-2/259	3/21/79	3	Georgia	FA/06	14/0
71	Darrell Shropshire (T)	6-2/301	3/18/83	3	South Carolina	D7/05	13/1
LINEBACKERS							
52	Jordan Beck	6-2/231	4/18/83	3	Cal Poly	D3/05	15/0
59	Michael Boley	6-3/236	8/24/82	3	Southern Miss	D5a/05	16/14
56	Keith Brooking	6-2/245	10/30/75	10	Georgia Tech	D1/98	16/16
53	John Leake	6-0/241	8/28/81	3	Clemson	FA/06	14/0
54	Stephen Nicholas	6-1/232	5/1/83	R	South Florida	D4a/07	—
46	Ryan Riddle	6-2/260	7/5/81	3	California	FA/07	5/0
50	Marcus Wilkins	6-2/235	1/2/80	6	Texas	FA/07	16/0
51	Demorrio Williams	6-0/232	7/6/80	4	Nebraska	D4/04	16/9
DEFENSIVE BACKS							
25	Chris Crocker (S)	5-11/194	3/9/80	5	Marshall	T-Cle/06	16/15
21	DeAngelo Hall (CB)	5-10/197	11/19/83	4	Virginia Tech	D1a/04	16/16
23	Chris Houston (CB)	5-9/185	10/18/84	R	Arkansas	D2b/07	—
30	David Irons (CB)	5-10/190	10/9/82	R	Auburn	D6b/07	—
37	Derrick Johnson (CB)	5-10/186	2/9/82	3	Washington	FA/06	5/0
26	Omare Lowe (CB)	6-1/195	4/20/78	6	Washington	W-Sea/05	16/0
36	Lawyer Milloy (S)	6-0/190	11/14/73	12	Washington	FA/06	16/15
20	Allen Rossum (CB)	5-8/187	10/22/75	10	Notre Dame	FA/02	16/6
29	Lewis Sanders (CB)	6-1/210	6/22/78	8	Maryland	FA/07	9/7
39	Daren Stone (S)	6-3/218	8/21/85	R	Maine	D6d/07	—
24	Jimmy Williams (CB)	6-2/213	3/8/84	2	Virginia Tech	D2/06	13/5
SPECIALISTS							
	Billy Cundiff (K)	6-2/200	3/30/80	6	Drake	FA/07	5/0
2	Aaron Elling (K)	6-2/201	5/31/78	5	Wyoming	FA/07	0/0
9	Michael Koenen (P/K)	5-11/195	7/13/82	3	Western Washington	FA/05	16/0

Abbreviations: D1-draft pick, first round; W-claimed on waivers; T-obtained in trade; FA-free agent acquisition.



# PANTHERS

**After retooling the offense, Carolina hopes to avoid another disappointing season**

**SN PICK** 2nd, NFC South (7-9)

By PAT YASINSKAS

When a trendy Super Bowl pick instead goes 8-8 and misses the playoffs, something has to give. Offensive coordinator Dan Henning was that something. Offensive line coach Mike Maser, secondary coach Rod Perry, veteran linebacker Chris Draft, defensive end Al Wallace and special teams ace Karl Hankton were pushed out the door, too.

The firing of Henning was painful for coach John Fox, who had kept his coaching staff largely intact for his first five seasons. But with the running game, which was supposed to be the backbone of the offense, struggling to establish any consistency, a drastic move was inevitable. Fox is counting on Jeff Davidson, the Browns' offensive line coach the past two years, to bring major changes. Davidson was schooled in Charlie Weis' offensive system in New England before moving to Cleveland with Romeo Crennel.

Davidson's performance could make or break Fox, who will be on the hot seat if the team falls short of the playoffs for the second consecutive year.

## OFFENSE

Davidson's first priority is to get the running game back to a respectable level, which he'll try to do by tailoring the offense to his personnel. He will switch to a zone-blocking scheme to take advantage of the athleticism of his linemen and the speed of running backs DeShaun Foster and DeAngelo Williams. But Davidson and Fox also know they have one of the league's most dynamic weapons in wide receiver Steve Smith, so look for a relatively balanced scheme.

**Quarterbacks**—One of Davidson's major tasks will be to help Jake Delhomme recover the winning touch he possessed in 2003, when the team advanced to the Super Bowl, and '05, when the team reached the NFC championship game.

Davidson won't change Delhomme's game much, but offensive alterations will be made with the intent of making Delhomme more efficient. Davidson

## SCHEDULE

All times Eastern

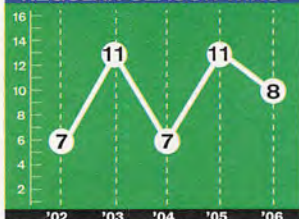
Sept. 9	at St. Louis	1:00
Sept. 16	HOUSTON	1:00
Sept. 23	at Atlanta	4:15
Sept. 30	TAMPA BAY	4:05
Oct. 7	at New Orleans	1:00
Oct. 14	at Arizona	4:05
Oct. 21	Open date	
Oct. 28	INDIANAPOLIS	1:00
Nov. 4	at Tennessee	1:00
Nov. 11	ATLANTA	1:00
Nov. 18	at Green Bay	1:00
Nov. 25	NEW ORLEANS	1:00
Dec. 2	SAN FRANCISCO	1:00
Dec. 9	at Jacksonville	1:00
Dec. 16	SEATTLE	1:00
Dec. 22	DALLAS††	8:15
Dec. 30	at Tampa Bay	1:00

Strength of schedule: 26th

††Saturday

Analysis of every Panthers game:  
sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom

## REGULAR-SEASON WINS



Delhomme



won't infringe on the unique and productive chemistry between Delhomme and Smith, but he'll put Smith in motion more often to confuse defenses and spring him open more easily. Davidson also expects Delhomme to have more targets among the tight ends and other receivers.

Backup Chris Weinke failed to produce in three late-season games last season and was released. The team brought in David Carr, who struggled with a bad team and high expectations in Houston but represents a significant upgrade over Weinke. Carr has the talent to resurrect his career, so the team won't be very patient if Delhomme struggles. Carr still has a nice arm and good mobility, but he needs to improve his mechanics and recover the confidence he lost in five rough years with the Texans.

Second-year pro Brett Basanez returns as the No. 3. He does not have great size or a strong arm. But the team likes his intangibles, and he eventually could develop into a solid backup.

#### GRADE: B-

**Running backs**—Delhomme is at his best when the running game is good enough to keep defenses honest—and it wasn't in 2006.

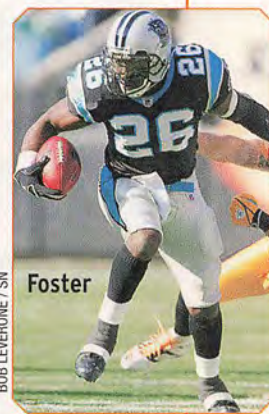
That may be because the team was running plays originally designed for Stephen Davis, a power back who left the team after the 2005 season. Neither Foster nor Williams could excel in that system. So, along with the new zone-blocking scheme, there will be more stretch plays and cutback running to take advantage of the speed and agility of Williams and Foster.

The team will focus on trying to pick up significant yardage on first and second down, controlling the ball and controlling the clock—and the power game won't be entirely abandoned. Foster has enough size to be effective inside, and the team hopes third-year running back Eric Shelton can develop into a short-yardage specialist.

## SCOUT TAKES

### A scout from another team sizes up the Panthers

**Jake Delhomme** had a bit of a tough year, but he has been a gamer and they have a history of rallying around him. So the players should still buy into him being a leader and getting them into position to win games. ... I love **DeAngelo Williams**. Sure, he's a little undersized, but I think he'll be able to handle a lot of the running workload this season if **DeShaun Foster** is not doing it. ... I can understand why they didn't trade **Kris Jenkins**, even though there was speculation. He's still one of the top run stuffers in the game, and those guys are hard to find and hard to replace. ... They weren't able to do much in free agency besides getting **David Carr**, but they made some really smart moves in the draft and selected some good players. So I don't know why they wouldn't be better than they were last year.



Foster

BOB LEVERONE / SN

## SCOUTING REPORTS: OFFENSE

After struggling as a blocker in his first training camp, Shelton never was able to get out of Henning's doghouse and could benefit from a fresh start under Davidson. Fullback Brad Hoover is a dependable blocker, and he could assume the short-yardage role if Shelton fails to emerge. Nick Goings, a backup at running back and fullback, could get a lot of playing time in passing situations. **GRADE: C+**

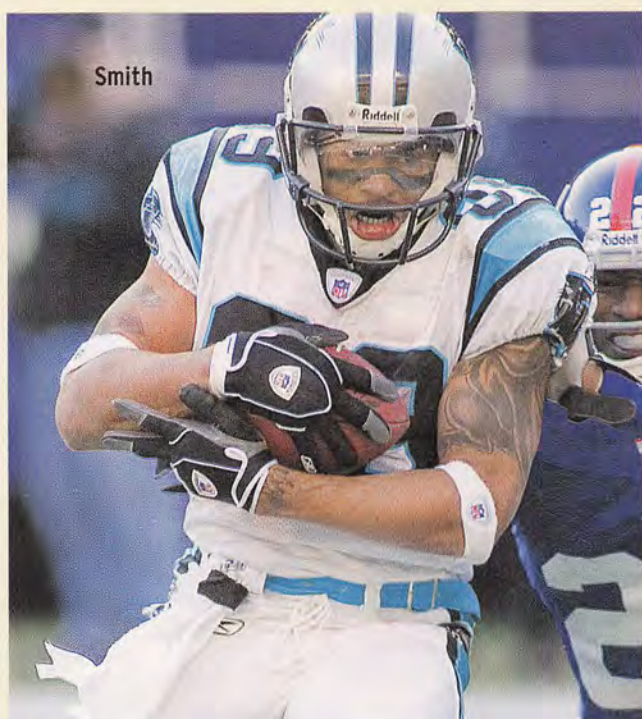
**Receivers**—Smith is the offense's best player, a complete receiver and Delhomme's favorite target—but he was limited last season by the lack of consistent weapons on hand. As a result, defenses were able to load up against him. Davidson intends to get more receivers involved to keep defenses honest.

A big part of that equation will be second-round pick Dwayne Jarrett, a 6-4 possession receiver who will replace Keyshawn Johnson as the No. 2 wideout. Davidson may use more three- and four-receiver sets, but for them to work, backups Drew Carter and Keary Colbert need to step up. Carter has size and raw speed but needs to improve his hands. Colbert fell out of favor with Henning and could be helped by a fresh start.

The tight ends, used primarily as blockers in the past, will play a bigger part in the passing game. The biggest beneficiary could be starter Michael Gaines, a nice target with good speed. Gaines has flashed potential but also has been inconsistent. Second-year man Jeff King, a former college basketball player, could emerge as Gaines' backup because the system will ask for more athleticism from the tight ends. **GRADE: B**

**Line**—This unit doesn't have great collective size or power, but it has some exceptional athletes who could thrive in the new zone-blocking scheme. Left tackle Travelle Wharton, right tackle Jordan Gross and left guard Mike Wahle can be particularly effective because of their quickness and footwork.

Center Justin Hartwig, who missed most of last season with an injury, is expected to be healthy, but he isn't certain to reclaim his spot. That's because the team picked center Ryan Kalil in the second round. If Kalil wins the job, Hartwig could move to guard or tackle. If Hartwig stays at center, Kalil could compete with Geoff Hangartner and Evan Mathis for the right guard job. Mathis struggled in the power blocking scheme but



JOHN DUNN FOR SN

**Jake Delhomme, QB**

**Strengths:** Has more heart, toughness and will to win than pure talent. A gunslinger with good arm strength and the ability to drop his arm angle and make any throw. Has a quick setup and release. Has a good touch and solid accuracy on short throws and on passes over the middle. Can buy time and pick up first downs with his feet.

**Weaknesses:** Not very athletic, quick or fast. Takes sacks when he gets rattled early, then tries to do too much. Supreme confidence also is a deterrent at times; throws too many interceptions because he tries to make plays that aren't there.

**Bottom line:** Delhomme likely will benefit from the arrival of new coordinator Jeff Davidson, who loves to create mismatches with formations. That will give Delhomme more options in the passing game. **Grade: 8.4**

**↑ DeAngelo Williams, RB**

**Strengths:** A good inside runner who attacks the hole and slashes between the tackles. Also has enough speed to gain the corner. Shows great cutback ability and has good change-of-direction skills. Runs low with good leverage and balance; tough to bring down in the open field.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks elusiveness and takes on too many defenders. A will-

ing blocker but is undersized and lacks the strength to maintain blocks. Must improve blitz recognition and receiving skills. Durability is a concern.

**Bottom line:** Williams lacks ideal physical traits but has the skills to be the feature back in Carolina. He will continue to improve with experience.

**Grade: 7.7**

**↓ DeShaun Foster, RB**

**Strengths:** Has outstanding speed and the burst to hit the hole the instant he sees a gap. Athletic and has soft hands. Runs with good balance and breaks more tackles than he gets credit for.

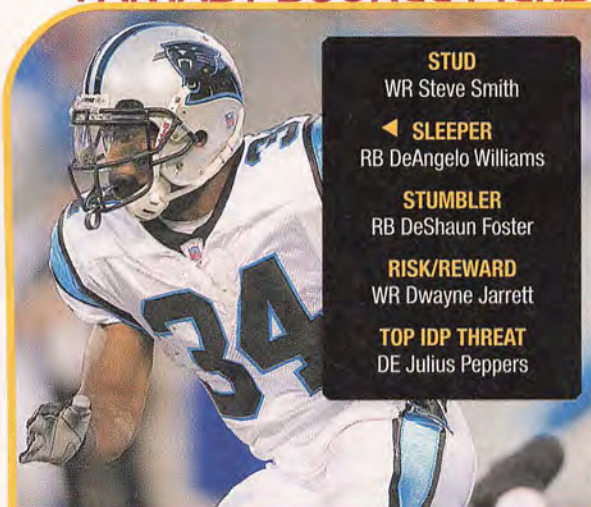
**Weaknesses:** Marginal in blitz pickup. Does not front up the defender well. Injury history is a major concern. Struggles to carry the workload.

**Bottom line:** With Williams' star on the rise, Foster will have to dominate in the preseason to be anything more than a back who splits time. **Grade: 7.5**

**Steve Smith, WR**

**Strengths:** Explodes out of cuts. An agile, crisp short-to-intermediate route runner who doesn't hesitate to go over the middle and can make difficult catches in traffic. Shows a second gear in the open field and has excellent vision. An elusive big-play threat who tracks the ball well. Rarely

## FANTASY SOURCE PICKS



BOB LEVERONE / SN

**STUD**

WR Steve Smith

**← SLEEPER**

RB DeAngelo Williams

**STUMBLER**

RB DeShaun Foster

**RISK/REWARD**

WR Dwayne Jarrett

**TOP IDP THREAT**

DE Julius Peppers

Fantasy Source Football is your online fantasy authority. Go to [fantasy.sportingnews.com/nfl](http://fantasy.sportingnews.com/nfl).

Players are graded by War Room scouts on a 1-10 scale.

\*Rookies (not graded)

drops passes.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks the frame to shield defenders from the ball; physical corners can muscle him out of his routes. Lacks ideal bulk and strength to be an effective blocker but is willing.

**Bottom line:** In playing through an injury in 2006, Smith showed he has the toughness to complement stand-out skills. He is a dominant player at his position. **Grade: 9.8**

### \*Dwayne Jarrett, WR

**Strengths:** Uses hands, long arms and body well. Catches off-target throws. Aggressive. Does a good job of getting yards after contact. Though a tad thin, has more than enough size and strength to be a good blocker.

**Weaknesses:** Tends to run upright. Struggles to make quick cuts. Doesn't get consistent separation. Lacks explosiveness and speed to turn short passes into long touchdowns. Lacks burst.

**Bottom line:** Jarrett does not have superstar ability but acts like he does.

### Michael Gaines, TE

**Strengths:** Has solid strength and moves well with good range. Has nice quickness and size. Rarely drops passes.

**Weaknesses:** Relatively unpolished athlete who lacks ideal speed. Plays with poor technique.

**Bottom line:** Gaines has the ability to develop into a fine route runner, and he has good upside. **Grade: 6.3**

### Jordan Gross, T

**Strengths:** Plays with a mean streak. Has the upper-body strength to knock defenders back and enough lower-body strength to hold his ground against bull rushers. Rarely takes false steps and has good range. Plays under control in space; rarely lunges and has good lateral mobility. Maintains separation and is fundamentally sound.

**Weaknesses:** Struggles to anchor when he loses leverage off the line. Lacks an explosive first step and struggles to prevent penetration.

**Bottom line:** Though Gross has only adequate size, he is an explosive drive blocker who plays with a nonstop motor. **Grade: 7.4**

### Travelle Wharton, T

**Strengths:** Takes good angles to

blocks and can sustain them. Has a quick first step, plays with a wide base and has good footwork. Has good range and body control in space and gets set quickly. Holds his ground against bull rushers.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks prototypical size and strength; won't engulf many defenders or push the pile. Doesn't play with a mean streak.

**Bottom line:** Wharton missed most of last season with a knee injury, but he is expected to make a full recovery and is penciled in as the starter on the left side. **Grade: 7.2**

### Mike Wahle, G

**Strengths:** Seldom takes false steps and is physical at the point of attack. Gets good leverage, keeps legs driving after contact and can push the pile. Runs screens well and is among the league's best at pulling and trapping. **Weaknesses:** If he misses with his hands, he can be beaten in pass protection.

**Bottom line:** Wahle made the move to Carolina two years ago and rewarded the club by solidifying the interior of the line. When healthy, he is a top NFL starter. **Grade: 8.6**

### Evan Mathis, G

**Strengths:** Has a great frame, good technique and solid upper-body strength. Moves his feet well laterally and can pull and move in space.

**Weaknesses:** Must strengthen his lower body. Struggles to anchor against bull rushers.

**Bottom line:** Mathis earned a starting job last season and did well enough to retain it this season. **Grade: 6.0**

### ↑ Justin Hartwig, C

**Strengths:** Takes excellent angles to the second level. Has a good feel for stunts, twists and delayed blitzes. A physical, aggressive run blocker who slides his feet well laterally.

**Weaknesses:** Not real explosive. Sometimes comes off combo run blocks too quickly and allows penetration. Has trouble protecting edges.

**Bottom line:** Hartwig's health—he missed most of 2006 with a groin injury—will be a key factor in how successful Carolina's offense will be. **Grade: 7.4**

**KEY:** ↑ Ascending ↓ Descending

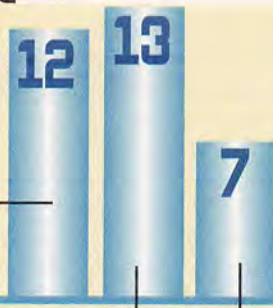
## INSIDERS POLL

With new coordinator Jeff Davidson to work with, Jake Delhomme will:

Re-establish himself as an efficient QB who is tough in the clutch

Rebound slightly but fall short of his former self

Continue his slide of '06



Based on a poll of SN's 32 team correspondents

## BOLD PREDICTIONS

**1** QB Jake Delhomme will bounce back from a down season, find targets other than favorite receiver Steve Smith and throw 25 touchdown passes.

**2** LE Julius Peppers will fall short of double-digit sacks for the first time since 2003. Peppers will play well, but his surrounding cast won't be as good and he'll draw more blockers.

**3** DeAngelo Williams will take over as the feature back and run for more than 1,200 yards. He'll prosper behind the new zone-blocking scheme, which will showcase his cutback ability.

may be able to re-establish himself in the new system.

Journeyman Jeremy Bridges can play inside or outside and has enough quickness to fit the new scheme. With Gross and Wharton heading into the final year of their contracts, second-year pro Rashad Butler also could get a look at tackle.

Though the emphasis will be on improving the running game, pass blocking also needs to take a step up. Delhomme was under pressure too much last season. But putting Gross back in his natural spot on the right side and plugging a healthy Wharton back into the left side will give the team its best possible matchups against ends. **GRADE: C+**

## DEFENSE

Fox and coordinator Mike Trgovac always emphasize stopping the run and getting strong pressure out of the front four. That formula didn't work well enough last season and, though the changes won't be as dramatic as those on offense, there will be some tweaks and new points of emphasis. The team wants more big plays from the linebackers—and Thomas Davis could be used more as a blitzer from the strong side to help keep blocking attention off left end Julius Peppers.

**Line**—This unit is supposed to be the strength of the defense, but Peppers—one of the league's most dominant pass rushers—didn't get much help from the rest of the line last season.

Mike Rucker, the other starting end, showed signs of aging before suffering a season-ending knee injury. Rucker's health could be a concern early, so the team might need significant contributions from second-year pro Stanley McClover and third-round pick Charles Johnson, both of whom will be in the team's active rotation.

A big experiment in the middle of the line failed to pan out last season. The team put 350-pound tackles Kris Jenkins and Maake Kemoeatu side-by-side thinking the two giants could stuff any running game. Jenkins and Kemoeatu weren't bad together, but the team lost middle linebacker Dan Morgan in the first game, which left it without someone who could get to ballcarriers.

The team will do the same thing this year and hope a healthy Morgan will make the difference. Jenkins needs to keep his weight in check, because when healthy and in shape, he can be as dominant as any inside pass rusher in the league.

The depth at tackle also is good. Damione Lewis likely will replace Kemoeatu on passing downs and Kindal Moorehead, a former starter, will be the fourth tackle. Moorehead, who can generate a rush from the middle, also will get some playing time on passing downs. **GRADE: B**

**Linebackers**—The team built this unit with speed—and the key is Morgan. If he's healthy, he can go sideline to sideline and make plays that make the entire defense better. But he has played in an average of 9.3 games per season in his six-year career, so the team used its first-round pick on an insurance policy named Jon Beason, who also has sideline-to-sideline speed. Beason could open the season as a weakside starter ahead of Na'il Diggs and James Anderson, but he'll be ready to slide into the middle if Morgan has more health problems.

Davis is an outstanding athlete, but he made plenty of mistakes last year, his first as a starter. That won't be acceptable this season.

If Beason doesn't start on the weak side, Anderson or Diggs will. Both have excellent speed that allows them to drop into coverage and cover a lot of ground against the running game. If one can grasp the mental responsibilities, the team might be able to sub him in for Morgan at times and reduce his exposure to injury. **GRADE: C+**

**Secondary**—Former Giants coordinator Tim Lewis was brought in to coach the defensive backs, in large part because he's viewed as an aggressive and vocal coach.

There's plenty of raw talent at cornerback with Ken Lucas, Chris Gamble and second-year player Richard Marshall. But

## SECRET WEAPON

### MICHAEL GAINES, TE

The team wants more receiving production from the tight end position, and Gaines has the raw tools to give it to them. He started nine games last year to gain valuable experience that should translate into more catches, more yards and more consistent blocking in the running game.

## SCOUTING REPORTS: DEFENSE

### ↑ Julius Peppers, E

**Strengths:** Has outstanding quickness, strength and instincts. Plays with good leverage. Uses hands and long arms well and sheds blocks quickly. Has a good motor and outstanding range; always is around the ball. Has good lateral mobility and a variety of pass-rush moves. Versatile and durable.

**Weaknesses:** Can be moved off the line when he is double-teamed. Will make a big play, then disappear for a spell.

**Bottom line:** The NFL's best athlete at end, Peppers has continued to improve his game and now is a perennial Pro Bowler. **Grade: 9.3**

### ↓ Mike Rucker, E

**Strengths:** Has a quick first step and good instincts. Uses his hands well, maintains separation and sheds quickly. Takes good angles, closes cutback lanes and excels in pursuit. Has good lateral mobility and is a relentless pass rusher.

**Weaknesses:** Struggles when teams run at him. Lacks bulk, can get engulfed and wears down easily. Sometimes takes himself out of plays.

**Bottom line:** Rucker is not the same player he was two years ago. He still is a decent starter, but he is on the downside of his career. **Grade: 7.1**

### Maake Kemoeatu, T

**Strengths:** Has tremendous size, bulk and strength. Has the power to anchor at the point of attack against double-teams and the ability to split the gap. Quick to shed and can track ballcarriers well.

**Weaknesses:** Has only one pass-rush move: the bull rush. Only a two-down player.

**Bottom line:** Kemoeatu's presence allows the Panthers' linebackers to flow to the ball and be more active. **Grade: 8.0**

### ↓ Kris Jenkins, T

**Strengths:** Plays with a mean streak and never stops hustling. Uses his hands well and maintains separation. Disrupts running plays in the backfield. Has great range and can shoot inside gaps. Has superior closing speed and a variety of moves.

**Weaknesses:** Plays too high, struggles to anchor against double-teams and lacks recognition. Takes poor angles at times and gets too far upfield.

Durability is a major concern.

**Bottom line:** After missing most of 2004 and '05, Jenkins made it through last season unscathed and returned to the Pro Bowl. Still, he needs to play with more urgency. **Grade: 7.8**

### ↓ Dan Morgan, LB

**Strengths:** Has excellent range and takes good angles. Makes reads quickly, rarely takes false steps and is disciplined. Physical at the point of attack and has a good motor. A reliable open-field tackler.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks bulk and strength. Has major durability concerns. Takes too long to shed blocks.

**Bottom line:** Morgan is one of the better middle linebackers in the NFL, but he needs to show he can put together a 16-game season to join the elite class. **Grade: 8.5**

### ↑ Thomas Davis, LB

**Strengths:** A headhunter who always is looking for the big hit. Has good speed and range. A great athlete.

**Weaknesses:** Needs work on coverage skills. Plays stiff.

**Bottom line:** A converted safety, Davis made a nice transition to linebacker last season. He has the athletic ability and the football instincts to be a factor in the run game. **Grade: 6.5**

### James Anderson, LB

**Strengths:** Has good speed and athleticism. Makes plays sideline to sideline. Can turn and run with tight ends and running backs. Works hard.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks the size and lower-body strength to play with leverage at the point of attack. Gets engulfed and struggles to shed blocks. Sometimes gets caught in traffic.

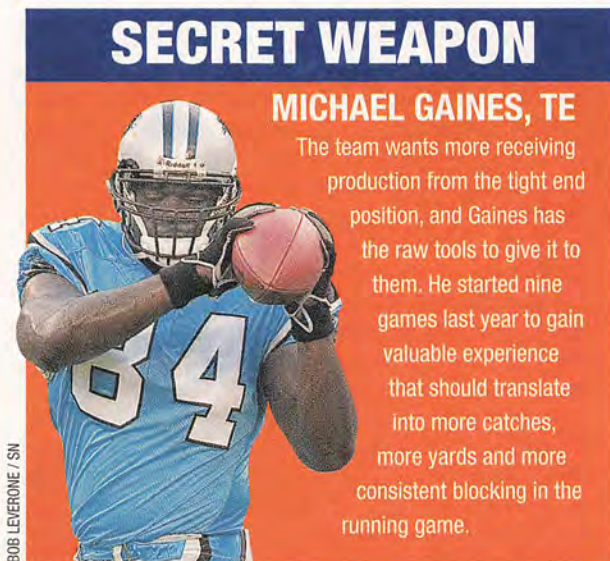
**Bottom line:** Anderson has good speed and athleticism but must bulk up to be most effective. **Grade: 5.8**

### \*Jon Beason, LB

**Strengths:** Quick and aggressive. Chases down plays in pursuit. Has a quick burst to the quarterback and the athleticism and speed to stay with backs and tight ends. Moves well through traffic and avoids blockers nicely.

**Weaknesses:** Undersized; struggles to hold his ground. Consistently bites hard on fakes. Lacks ball awareness and allows too many receptions even when in good position.

**Bottom line:** Beason needs work in



BOB LEVERONE / SN



BOB LEVERONE / SN

some areas but has a good shot at starting as a rookie. He has the athleticism and speed to become a great special teams player.

### Ken Lucas, CB

**Strengths:** Has good strength and is quick for his size. Has solid recovery speed and good hands and ball skills. Uses his size well in press coverage.  
**Weaknesses:** Must be more physical and aggressive when the ball is in the air and take better angles. Lacks turn-and-run skills.

**Bottom line:** Lucas took a step back in 2006 because of lingering injuries. If he is healthy, expect him to return to form in 2007. **Grade: 8.1**

### Richard Marshall, CB

**Strengths:** Has good skills, size, strength and speed. Changes direction well and can turn and run with speedy receivers. Has a quick burst. Has excellent hands and the leaping ability to win battles for passes. Fills holes hard against the run.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks elite size. Shows marginal route-recognition skills. Gets beat by receivers coming out of breaks. Loses the ball at times.

**Bottom line:** Marshall has the athleticism, confidence and playmaking abil-

ity to be an effective starter. **Grade: 7.5**

### Mike Minter, S

**Strengths:** Has excellent instincts, reads keys quickly and is effective against the run. A reliable open-field tackler who looks to strip the ball. Accelerates quickly and stays with most tight ends. Plays with discipline and rarely bites on play-action.

**Weaknesses:** Occasionally drops picks. Has lost a step and gets engulfed. Lacks good upper-body strength.

**Bottom line:** Minter is a quality leader and a solid starter for one of the better defenses in the NFL. **Grade: 7.9**

### Deke Cooper, S

**Strengths:** Has good size and excellent instincts. Shows good range, anticipates well and gets good jumps on the ball. Has good ball skills and soft hands.

**Weaknesses:** An average athlete who doesn't strike a blow as a tackler. Gets out of control trying to tackle in the open field.

**Bottom Line:** Cooper is an instinctive player who lacks ideal athleticism and playmaking ability. His understanding of the game and discipline in coverage make him a capable player. **Grade: 6.6**

## KEY MOVES

### 2007 DRAFT PICKS

#### Rd.-Pick

**GRADE B**

#### 1-25 Jon Beason, LB, Miami

Intelligent, versatile. Has the speed to chase down plays and cover.

#### 2-45 Dwayne Jarrett, WR, USC

Big, physical receiver will be counted on to replace Keyshawn Johnson.

#### 2-59 Ryan Kalil, C, USC

Athletic and smart but lacks brute strength. Could be moved to guard.

#### 3-83 Charles Johnson, DE, Georgia

Solid against the run. Will complement pass rusher Julius Peppers.

#### 4-118 Ryne Robinson, WR/KR, Miami (Ohio)

Has the speed and elusiveness to be a game-breaker.

#### 5-155 Dante Rosario, TE/FB, Oregon

Versatile player will provide insurance for FB Brad Hoover.

#### 5-164 Tim Shaw, LB, Penn State

Provides depth at all three positions. Likely will help on special teams.

#### 7-226 C.J. Wilson, CB, Baylor

Has the size (6-1, 195) to move to safety. Could contribute on special teams.

### VETERAN PLAYERS

**Additions:** DE Dave Ball (FA/Jets), QB David Carr (FA/Texans), S Deke Cooper (FA/49ers), CB Curtis DeLoatch (FA/Saints), DT Chad Lavalais (FA/Falcons), LB Terrence Melton (FA/Saints).

**Losses:** LB Vinny Ciurciu (FA/Vikings), LB Chris Draft (FA/Rams), WR Karl Hankton (FA), WR Keyshawn Johnson (FA), TE Kris Mangum (retired), S Kevin McCadam (FA/Jaguars), DE Al Wallace (FA), QB Chris Weinke (FA).

Lucas was tentative last season and was benched at one point for poor tackling. Gamble had similar problems and was beaten in coverage. Lewis will challenge Lucas and Gamble to become much more physical, a quality that was missing in the secondary last season.

With Marshall around, Lucas and Gamble are not guaranteed starting jobs and will need to step it up quickly. Marshall had a very good rookie season and showed some big-play ability. He is solid against the pass and run and probably is the team's most well-rounded corner.

The team wanted to get younger at safety through the draft but failed to select one. That means veteran Mike Minter will remain the free safety and the team will look to bring in another starter through the free-agent market or a trade. If it fails on that front, Deke Cooper, who is a capable veteran backup, will have to step into the starting lineup.

In that scenario, second-year pro Nate Salley will be the top backup safety. Salley was limited to special teams as a rookie, but the team likes his potential. If he does not become more physical, though, the team will turn to Derrick Strait, who also has limited experience and hasn't shown he can defend the deep ball. **GRADE: C**

### SPECIAL TEAMS

The nucleus of kicker John Kasay, punter Jason Baker and long snapper Jason Kyle remains in place, but special teams coach Danny Crossman needs to upgrade the return game and overhaul the coverage units.

In the past, the Panthers have had players such as Smith and Gamble double up as starters and return men. But they hope to



move away from that—especially after the success the Bears had with return specialist Devin Hester last year. Carolina used a fourth-round pick on Ryne Robinson, who was an explosive punt returner in college.

Williams was decent as a kickoff returner last year, but his duties as a running back probably will increase and Robinson likely will return kickoffs as well.

The coverage units also will count on young players after the departures of Hankton, Vinny Ciurciu and Kevin McCadam, the top three special teams tacklers from last season. Salley, for one, will be asked to take on a much bigger role. **GRADE: C+**

## STADIUM/MEDIA

Bank of America Stadium (73,298, grass)

Tickets: 704-358-7800

Training camp: Wofford College, Spartanburg, S.C.; 704-358-7000

Radio: WBT (99.3 FM & 1110 AM)

Website: panthers.com

## BOTTOM LINE

Fox was a hero after after taking over a 1-15 team and getting it to the Super Bowl two years later. But the glitter from that 2003 run has faded, and Fox is under pressure to produce. Now.

Last year was a huge disappointment to fans, ownership, coaches and players—and anything less than a winning season could mean big trouble for Fox. But don't count him out. This team has the talent to bounce back and make a decent run at the playoffs.

Not many teams have the type of 1-2 punch the Panthers feature in Smith and Peppers—possibly the best players in the league at their positions. But the team needs Morgan, Wharton and Hartwig to stay healthy and have the kind of impact everyone thought they would last year.

SN

Pat Yasinskas covers the Panthers for the Charlotte Observer.

Wahle



## PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

### OFFENSE

- QB** ■ Jake Delhomme  
● David Carr  
**FB** ● Brad Hoover  
□ Nick Goings  
**RB** ■ DeAngelo Williams  
● DeShaun Foster  
**WR** ▲ Steve Smith  
□ Drew Carter  
**WR** ● Dwayne Jarrett  
● Keary Colbert  
**TE** ● Michael Gaines  
□ Jeff King  
**LT** ● Travelle Wharton  
□ Rashad Butler  
**LG** ■ Mike Wahle  
□ Will Montgomery  
**C** ■ Justin Hartwig  
● Ryan Kalil  
**RG** ● Evan Mathis  
● Geoff Hangartner  
**RT** ■ Jordan Gross  
● Jeremy Bridges

### DEFENSE

- LE** ▲ Julius Peppers  
□ Stanley McClover  
**LT** ● Maake Kemoeatu  
□ Jordan Carstens  
**RT** ■ Kris Jenkins  
● Damione Lewis  
**RE** ● Mike Rucker  
□ Charles Johnson  
**WLB** ● Jon Beason  
● James Anderson  
**MLB** ■ Dan Morgan  
□ Adam Seward  
**SLB** ● Thomas Davis  
□ Tim Shaw  
**LCB** ■ Richard Marshall  
● Chris Gamble  
**SS** □ Deke Cooper  
□ Nate Salley  
**FS** ● Mike Minter  
□ Nate Salley  
**RCB** ■ Ken Lucas  
□ Derrick Strait

### SPECIALISTS

- K** ■ John Kasay  
**P** ■ Jason Baker  
**KR** ● Ryne Robinson  
**PR** ● Ryne Robinson  
**LS** ▲ Jason Kyle

▲ Elite ■ Solid ● Adequate □ Fringe

Depth charts updated weekly at [sportingnews.com](http://sportingnews.com)

## PANTHERS ROSTER

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL exp.	College	How acq.	2006 GP/GS
QUARTERBACKS							
14	Brett Basanez	6-2/210	5/11/83	2	Northwestern	FA/06	1/0
8	David Carr	6-3/230	7/21/79	6	Fresno State	FA/07	16/16
17	Jake Delhomme	6-2/215	1/10/75	9	La-Lafayette	FA/03	13/13
RUNNING BACKS							
26	DeShaun Foster	6-0/222	1/10/80	6	UCLA	D2/02	14/14
37	Nick Goings	6-0/225	1/26/78	7	Pittsburgh	FA/01	11/0
45	Brad Hoover (FB)	6-0/245	11/11/76	8	Western Carolina	FA/00	16/12
48	Steven Jackson (FB)	6-2/260	5/11/84	1	Clemson	FA/06	0/0
32	Eric Shelton	6-1/246	6/23/83	3	Louisville	D2/05	9/0
34	DeAngelo Williams	5-9/216	4/25/83	2	Memphis	D1/06	13/2
RECEIVERS							
11	Taye Biddle	6-1/175	2/27/83	2	Mississippi	FA/06	2/0
18	Drew Carter	6-3/200	9/5/81	4	Ohio State	D5/04	14/2
83	Keary Colbert	6-1/200	5/21/82	4	USC	D2/04	12/3
84	Michael Gaines (TE)	6-3/280	3/30/80	4	Central Florida	D7/04	16/9
81	Chris Horn	5-11/195	7/13/77	4	Rocky Mountain	FA/07	0/0
80	Dwayne Jarrett	6-4/214	9/11/86	R	USC	D2a/07	—
87	Jeff King (TE)	6-3/253	2/19/83	2	Virginia Tech	D5/06	12/0
10	Ryne Robinson	5-9/179	11/4/84	R	Miami (Ohio)	D4/07	—
88	Dante Rosario (TE)	6-3/241	10/25/84	R	Oregon	D5a/07	—
89	Steve Smith	5-9/185	5/12/79	7	Utah	D3/01	14/14
80	Kevin Youngblood	6-5/215	11/22/80	2	Clemson	FA/07	1/0
OFFENSIVE LINEMEN							
76	D'Anthony Batiste (G)	6-4/318	3/29/81	2	La.-Lafayette	FA/06	0/0
73	Jeremy Bridges (T)	6-4/326	4/19/80	5	S. Mississippi	FA/06	14/14
79	Rashad Butler (T)	6-4/294	2/10/83	2	Miami	D3b/06	0/0
69	Jordan Gross (T)	6-4/300	7/20/80	5	Utah	D1/03	16/16
63	Geoff Hangartner (C)	6-5/301	4/22/82	3	Texas A&M	D5b/05	16/15
75	Justin Hartwig (C)	6-4/312	11/21/78	6	Kansas	FA/06	2/1
65	Ryan Kalil (C)	6-3/296	3/29/85	R	USC	D2b/07	—
71	Evan Mathis (G)	6-5/304	11/1/81	3	Alabama	D3a/05	15/15
66	Will Montgomery (C)	6-3/312	2/13/83	2	Virginia Tech	D7a/06	6/4
	Steve Scullio (G)	6-5/325	8/27/80	3	Marshall	FA/07	0/0
68	Mike Wahle (G)	6-6/304	3/29/77	10	Navy	FA/05	13/13
70	Travelle Wharton (T)	6-4/312	5/19/81	4	South Carolina	D3/04	1/1
DEFENSIVE LINEMEN							
96	Dave Ball (E)	6-5/277	1/4/81	4	UCLA	FA/07	10/0
67	Jordan Carstens (T)	6-5/300	1/22/81	4	Iowa State	FA/04	1/0
60	Otis Grigsby (E)	6-3/260	11/19/80	2	Kentucky	FA/06	0/0
77	Kris Jenkins (T)	6-4/335	8/3/79	7	Maryland	D2/01	16/16
95	Charles Johnson (E)	6-2/272	7/10/86	R	Georgia	D3/07	—
99	Maake Kemoeatu (T)	6-5/350	1/10/79	6	Utah	FA/06	16/14
91	Chad Lavalais (T)	6-1/293	4/15/79	4	LSU	D5/04	0/0
92	Damione Lewis (T)	6-2/301	3/1/78	7	Miami	FA/06	16/3
74	Stanley McClover (E)	6-2/263	12/16/84	2	Auburn	D7b/06	2/0
94	Kindal Moorehead (T)	6-2/285	10/14/78	5	Alabama	D5/03	16/0
90	Julius Peppers (E)	6-7/283	1/18/80	6	North Carolina	D1/02	16/16
93	Mike Rucker (E)	6-5/275	2/28/75	9	Nebraska	D2b/99	14/14
98	Stephen Williams (T)	6-2/306	9/21/81	2	N.W. Missouri St.	FA/07	11/0
LINEBACKERS							
50	James Anderson	6-2/230	9/26/83	2	Virginia Tech	D3a/06	16/2
52	Jon Beason	6-0/232	1/14/85	R	Miami	D1/07	—
58	Thomas Davis	6-0/231	3/22/83	3	Georgia	D1/05	14/14
53	Na'il Diggs	6-4/237	7/8/78	8	Ohio State	FA/06	15/10
57	Brandon Jamison	6-1/205	7/31/81	2	West Georgia	W-Alt/06	7/0
56	Jason Kyle	6-3/242	5/12/72	13	Arizona State	FA/01	16/0
54	Terrence Melton	6-1/235	1/1/77	4	Rice	FA/07	16/0
55	Dan Morgan	6-2/245	12/19/78	7	Miami	D1/01	1/1
59	Adam Seward	6-2/248	6/15/82	3	UNLV	D5a/05	16/2
49	Tim Shaw	6-1/233	3/27/84	R	Penn State	D5b/07	—
DEFENSIVE BACKS							
27	Dion Byrum (CB)	5-10/192	5/18/83	2	Ohio	FA/06	3/0
35	Deke Cooper (S)	6-2/210	10/18/77	5	Notre Dame	FA/07	1/0
41	Curtis DeLoatch (CB)	6-2/210	10/4/81	4	North Carolina A&T	FA/07	7/0
20	Chris Gamble (CB)	6-1/200	3/11/83	4	Ohio State	D1/04	15/13
	Kevin Garrett (CB)	5-9/194	7/29/80	3	S. Methodist	FA/07	1/0
21	Ken Lucas (CB)	6-0/205	1/23/79	7	Mississippi	FA/05	13/12
31	Richard Marshall (CB)	5-11/189	12/12/84	2	Fresno State	D2/06	16/8
30	Mike Minter (S)	5-10/195	1/15/74	11	Nebraska	D2/97	16/16
35	Christian Morton (CB)	6-0/181	4/28/81	3	Illinois	FA/06	7/2
29	Cam Newton (S)	6-1/203	5/19/82	3	Furman	FA/06	3/0
33	Nate Salley (S)	6-1/216	2/5/84	2	Ohio State	D4/06	7/0
22	Derrick Strait (CB)	5-11/189	8/27/80	4	Oklahoma	W-Chi/06	8/2
38	Garnell Wilds (CB)	5-11/196	6/8/81	4	Virginia Tech	FA/05	0/0
27	C.J. Wilson (CB)	6-1/195	4/2/85	R	Baylor	D7/07	—
SPECIALISTS							
7	Jason Baker (P)	6-2/201	5/17/78	7	Iowa	T-Den/05	16/0
4	John Kasay (K)	5-10/198	10/27/69	17	Georgia	FA/95	16/0

Abbreviations: D1-draft pick, first round; W-claimed on waivers; T-obtained in trade; FA-free-agent acquisition.



# BEARS

**Trust in Lovie is fine, but it's Grossman who must prove that the team's faith in him is not misplaced**

**SN PICK** 1st, NFC North (10-6)

By BRAD BIGGS

There's no need to remind the Bears that Super Bowl losers have not fared well recently. Since 1999, only two have reached the postseason the following year. With that in mind, the Bears underwent a significant makeover after falling to Indianapolis in Super Bowl 41.

Gone are running back Thomas Jones, the most productive member of the offense the past two seasons, and five assistant coaches, including defensive coordinator Ron Rivera. Coach Lovie Smith, whose long search for a rich contract extension was resolved in March, chose not to re-sign Rivera, a link to the organization's only Super Bowl winner. He was a linebacker on the '85 club.

But it's not like there won't be continuity. Only two starters from the Super Bowl team aren't returning. The Bears, who had eight players named to the Pro Bowl, remain on solid footing in a division where the competition still is rebuilding.

## OFFENSE

The company line on quarterback Rex Grossman is that he did well in his first full season as a starter after injuries plagued the beginning of his career. The question is: Can Grossman be more consistently productive in coordinator Ron Turner's system? Smith likes to say the Bears get off the bus running the ball, but they were only average in that area last season. With the elevation of Cedric Benson to feature back, things could be on the upswing because Benson fits Turner's scheme perfectly. But improvement will be measured most by the play of Grossman.

**Quarterbacks**—This will be a pivotal season for Grossman, a 2003 first-round pick who is entering the final year of his contract. Grossman was either really good or downright benchable in '06 and didn't provide much middle-of-the-road work. Too often, in the face of pressure, his

## SCHEDULE

All times Eastern

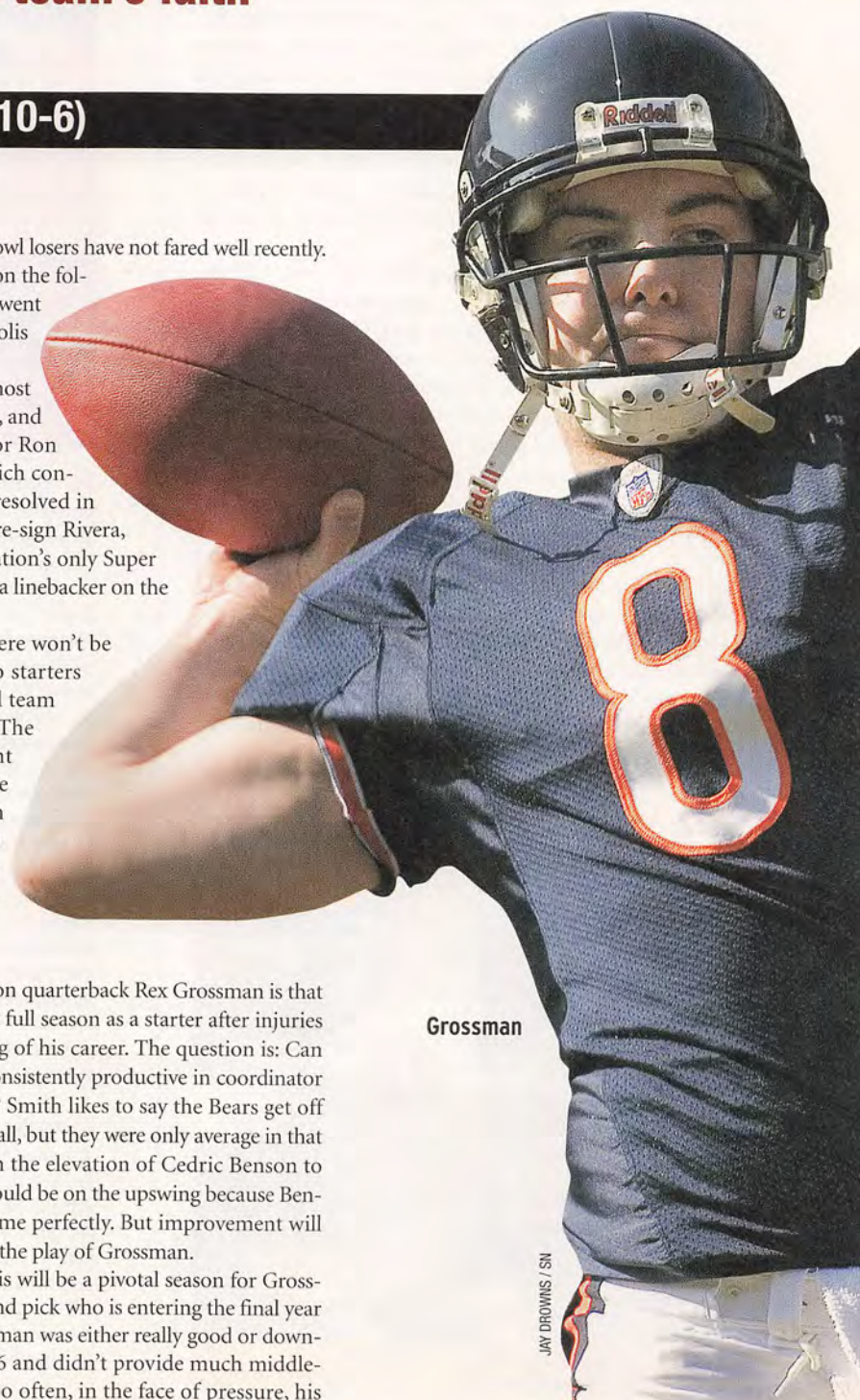
Sept. 9	at San Diego	4:15
Sept. 16	KANSAS CITY	4:15
Sept. 23	DALLAS	8:15
Sept. 30	at Detroit	1:00
Oct. 7	at Green Bay	8:15
Oct. 14	MINNESOTA	1:00
Oct. 21	at Philadelphia	4:15
Oct. 28	DETROIT	1:00
Nov. 4	Open date	
Nov. 11	at Oakland	4:15
Nov. 18	at Seattle	8:15
Nov. 25	DENVER	1:00
Dec. 2	N.Y. GIANTS	4:15
Dec. 6	at Washington†	8:15
Dec. 17	at Minnesota*	8:30
Dec. 23	GREEN BAY	1:00
Dec. 30	NEW ORLEANS	1:00

Strength of schedule: 31st

\*Monday †Thursday

Analysis of every Bears game:  
sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom

## REGULAR-SEASON WINS



Grossman

JAY DROWNS / NS

mechanics broke down. The belief is that experience combined with refined footwork will make him more consistent.

Backup Brian Griese is an experienced veteran who understands the offense. Grossman stretches the field vertically, but Griese will attack it sideline to sideline. A former starter for three teams, Griese is intelligent and savvy, and the Bears know if he's given the chance he might not relinquish the job. Kyle Orton, who won 10 games as a rookie in 2005, continues to bide his time as the third quarterback, hoping for a change of scenery sooner rather than later. **GRADE: C+**

**Running backs**—Jones, a leader in the locker room and the team's only consistent skill-position player for the last two seasons, was traded for one reason—to clear the field for Benson. Competition with Jones was difficult for Benson, and now that's not an issue. Benson averaged nearly 5 yards per carry in the second half of last season, but a minor knee injury in the Super Bowl didn't help his stock. He is a rugged runner ideally suited for Turner's between-the-tackles scheme. But with his bruising style comes questions of whether he can hold up for 16 games, especially given whispers of his reluctance to play with minor injuries.

Backup Adrian Peterson runs with great vision and balance. He will pick up yards when the blocking is there but won't create a lot on his own and lacks a top gear. Undersized rookie Garrett Wolfe has been compared to Warrick Dunn and Dave Meggett. If he's a little of both, he could eventually blossom into Benson's backup. Fullback Jason McKie proved to be durable last season and improved greatly at the point of attack. He has good hands and is a decent checkdown target. **GRADE: C+**

**Receivers**—The emergence of Bernard Berrian as a consistent deep threat and playmaker was one of the highlights for the offense last season. Berrian has top speed and good hands and is durable. Muhsin Muhammad is slowing down and could wind up in a position battle if Mark Bradley can stay on the field long enough to challenge him. Muhammad is a consistent possession receiver at a position where the Bears need someone with more speed to keep defenses from ganging up on Berrian.

Bradley also has top speed and great run-after-the-catch ability,

## FANTASY SOURCE PICKS

### STUD

WR Bernard Berrian

### STUMBLER

RB Cedric Benson

### BIGGEST RISK/REWARD

QB Rex Grossman

### DRAFT-DAY BARGAIN

TE Desmond Clark

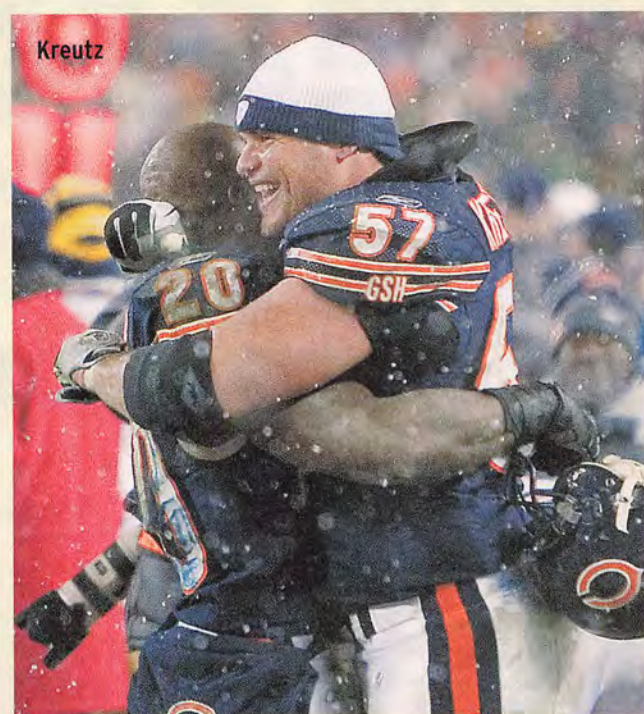
### COMEBACK CANDIDATE

WR Mark Bradley



Fantasy Source Football is your online fantasy authority. Go to [fantasy.sportingnews.com/nfl](http://fantasy.sportingnews.com/nfl).

## SCOUTING REPORTS: OFFENSE



### Rex Grossman, QB

**Strengths:** Has good mechanics and above-average athleticism. Sets up quickly, has a consistent delivery and is accurate on short-to-intermediate passes. Can throw into tight areas. Shows patience, has good pocket awareness and does a good job of moving his feet to buy time. Throws an accurate deep ball.

**Weaknesses:** Somewhat undersized and must scramble at times to create passing windows. Locks on to primary receivers and will force passes. Relies on natural ability too much. Stayed healthy last year, but durability has been an issue.

**Bottom line:** Plagued by wildly inconsistent performances in 2006, Grossman tried to do too much and ended up hurting himself and the team. If he improves his decision-making and consistency, he can be one of the top quarterbacks in the league. **Grade: 7.8**

### Cedric Benson, RB

**Strengths:** A big, physical power runner who excels between the tackles. Attacks the hole and finishes runs with force. Won't go down after initial contact and can break tackles. Can bounce runs outside and has good top speed in the open field.

**Weaknesses:** Has been plagued by injuries and inconsistency. Attitude

has been questioned. Inexperienced as a blocker and receiver.

**Bottom line:** Benson has been handed the keys to the team's running game. We'll see if he has the heart and toughness to carry the load. **Grade: 7.5**

### Jason McKie, FB

**Strengths:** A powerful fullback and good special teams player. Will lead-block on linebackers and clear out holes.

**Weaknesses:** Stiff in his back and hips. Not much besides a blocker.

**Bottom line:** McKie can be a receiving option but primarily is a blocker who will clear the way for Benson.

**Grade: 5.5**

### ↑ Bernard Berrian, WR

**Strengths:** Runs smooth routes, has good hands and is a quick player who is a threat to go the distance. A big-play receiver.

**Weaknesses:** Must improve his recognition skills and consistency. Not physical.

**Bottom line:** Berrian has worked on his route running and skills in the short-to-intermediate areas in an attempt to become a well-rounded receiver. **Grade: 8.0**

### ↓ Muhsin Muhammad, WR

**Strengths:** Can adjust to balls thrown outside his frame and make spectac-

Players are graded by War Room scouts on a 1-10 scale.  
\*Rookies (not graded)

ular catches. Uses size to shield defenders from the ball and has the hand strength to make tough catches in traffic. Times jumps well, fights for the ball in the air and has good awareness and body control. Productive red zone target. Runs with power and sustains blocks.

**Weaknesses:** Not a crisp intermediate route runner or a home run threat after the catch. Lacks explosiveness and burst out of cuts. Struggles to create separation vs. No. 1 corners. Doesn't read defenses well.

**Bottom line:** Muhammad's game is based on power and toughness. He has lost a step but still is a viable starter. **Grade: 7.5**

#### ↑ Desmond Clark, TE

**Strengths:** Has good quickness and running ability. Can stretch the seam against the cover 2 and outrun some linebackers. Gets a good release off the line and has good acceleration out of his breaks. Can line up in the slot, on the wing or at wide receiver and is a threat in the red zone. Blocks better in space because of his agility.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks the speed to challenge quicker defensive backs and the strength to block bigger ends and linebackers. Receiving skills are inconsistent.

**Bottom line:** Clark's versatility as a receiver outweighs his shortcomings as a blocker. **Grade: 7.0**

#### Fred Miller, T

**Strengths:** Durable and dependable, with excellent size. Understands angles in the running game and shows good awareness in pass protection.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks quickness off the line and will lose the leverage battle at the point of attack. Sometimes struggles to redirect in pass protection. Must make better adjustments in one-on-one matchups with pass rushers.

**Bottom line:** Miller is a solid starter but not an elite player. **Grade: 7.0**

#### John Tait, T

**Strengths:** Has good quickness, excellent size and athleticism. Can play right or left tackle. Delivers a hard initial blow and has the strength to get movement in the running game. Has good speed, can lead a screen play and is comfortable in space. Moves well laterally.

**Weaknesses:** Occasionally overex-

tends and gets overaggressive in pass protection. Loses leverage and will come off a little high at times.

**Bottom line:** A better right tackle than left tackle, Tait is a scrapper who does whatever is asked of him. **Grade: 7.0**

#### Roberto Garza, G

**Strengths:** Has good quickness and a feel for blocking angles. Plays with a mean streak. Moves well laterally and can get into position and execute assignments. Has the mobility and athleticism to make plays at the second level. Rarely gets beat off the ball and can handle quicker one-gap defenders.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal bulk, power and strength. Struggles to sustain blocks if out of position. Lacks leverage at times.

**Bottom line:** Garza is a relentless player with the athletic ability to be a versatile swing player at center and guard. **Grade: 6.0**

#### Ruben Brown, G

**Strengths:** Has the strength to get movement in the running game. Uses hands well and takes good angles on blocks. Anchors against bull rushers. Shows good ability to get outside on tosses and screens. Good at helping out on stunts.

**Weaknesses:** Relies too much on strength and loses leverage when tired. Inconsistent in cutoff blocks. Sometimes doesn't sustain blocks.

**Bottom line:** Although he made his ninth Pro Bowl last season, Brown is starting to age and is on the downside of his career. **Grade: 5.5**

#### Olin Kreutz, C

**Strengths:** Can play guard or center. An outstanding technician who has an explosive first step and good quickness and gets in great position. Can pull and get outside on screens and sweeps. Fairly efficient at finding targets downfield and great at picking up stunts and blitzes.

**Weaknesses:** Undersized. Won't overpower defensive tackles and lacks the strength to drive off bigger opponents. Doesn't get much movement when a defender is on his nose. Inconsistent when snapping in shotgun formation.

**Bottom line:** Kreutz may not look pretty, but he is tough and plays the game with fire. **Grade: 8.0**

**KEY:** ↑ Ascending ↓ Descending

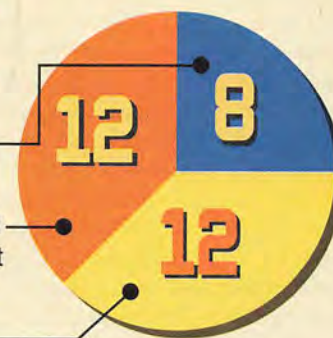
## INSIDERS POLL

Can the Bears win a Super Bowl with Rex Grossman?

Sure, I could see it happen

Only if the moon and stars are aligned just right

No way



Based on a poll of SN's 32 team correspondents

## BOLD PREDICTIONS

**1** Mark Anderson will unseat starting RDE Alex Brown. Anderson's production as a rookie (12 sacks) was off the charts. The more the Bears feed him, the more he seems to respond.

**2** DT Tommie Harris will contend for defensive player of the year. Harris knows what it takes to play at an elite level and can get strong consideration with 10 sacks, an attainable figure.

**3** Danieal Manning will be moved to cornerback. Nathan Vasher is expected to leave as a free agent next year, and Manning has good cover skills. And he doesn't tackle well enough at safety.

but another injury-plagued season in '06 cast doubt on his future. Converted cornerback Rashied Davis, who occasionally provided some big plays on third down, is quick but lacks size.

Tight end Desmond Clark became more involved in the offseason program in 2006, and the work paid dividends. He became a popular target for Grossman, particularly in the red zone, but he lacks the speed to do a lot of work downfield. Rookie Greg Olsen adds a dimension that had been missing: a target to stretch the field vertically. He presents a mismatch for linebackers and most safeties. **GRADE: C**

**Line**—One of the highest-paid lines in the league last season earned its money. The unit still is led by center Olin Kreutz, who has been selected to six consecutive Pro Bowls. The team re-signed left guard Ruben Brown, 35, who also went to the Pro Bowl and has put together a Hall of Fame-caliber resume.

But age is a concern. In addition to Brown, left tackle John Tait is 32 and battled an ankle injury in the second half of the season. Right tackle Fred Miller, 34, remains remarkably durable entering his 12th season. Right guard Roberto Garza played as well as Brown and has been a free-agent bargain.

John St. Clair is a dependable backup who can play both tackle positions and also move inside if needed. Terrence Metcalf, the projected heir apparent to Brown, is powerful but can be caught back on his heels at times. Guard Josh Beekman, a fourth-round draft pick, will be able to learn behind Brown. But the Bears need to groom more young players for the future or they will

## have multiple positions to fill all at once on the line. **GRADE: B+** **DEFENSE**

Winning breeds different kinds of problems, and nowhere is that more obvious than the Lance Briggs situation. The team placed the franchise tag on the weakside linebacker, who has threatened to sit out the season. Not having Briggs would make life more difficult for first-year coordinator Bob Babich, who was promoted from linebackers coach after Rivera's departure. Babich believes in the same system as Smith, and a premium will always be put on speed.

**Line**—A case can be made for tackle Tommie Harris' being the most valuable member of the defense. Named to his second straight Pro Bowl, Harris is the first player opposing offenses prepare for each week. He is coming off surgery to repair a torn hamstring that ended his season after 12 games, but all reports are he will be fine for training camp. Off-field woes continue to plague nose tackle Tank Johnson, who could be suspended during the 2007 season. One more foul-up and you can kiss him goodbye. Anthony Adams figures to be thrust into a starting position if Johnson is suspended. He's undersized, like Smith prefers, and can generate pressure.

Left end Adewale Ogunleye is solid but needs to pick up his pass rush a bit. Look for Mark Anderson, who had 12 sacks in limited playing time as a rookie, to challenge Alex Brown for the starting job at right end. Brown is a solid two-way end who plays the run effectively, but Anderson has a first step equaled by few and Smith's defense puts a premium on pressure.

Rookie Dan Bazuin is a high-motor edge rusher who will fit into the rotation immediately. Antonio Garay is a scrapper who will fight to the whistle on every play, but he is undersized and there are concerns about his durability. Dusty Dvoracek, who has much to prove after missing his rookie season, and versatile veteran Israel Idonije, who can line up at all four positions, also are likely to figure into the rotation. **GRADE: A-**

**Linebackers**—One of the first things Babich pledged when he took over the defense was to get middle linebacker Brian Urlacher more involved around the line of scrimmage. Urlacher, who has athletic skills unrivaled by others at his position, has gone 27 regular-season games without a sack. He doesn't like playing

## SCOUTING REPORTS: DEFENSE

### Adewale Ogunleye, E

**Strengths:** Can penetrate and disrupt plays in the backfield. Shows good acceleration to the corner as a pass rusher. Can explode into pass protectors and push the pocket with his momentum and bulk. Frequently drops into coverage in zone blitz situations.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks bulk, strength and quickness, and does not maintain leverage. Has problems with double-team blocks. Must develop more pass-rush moves.

**Bottom line:** Ogunleye is a solid pass rusher and average run defender who benefits from playing with other good linemen. **Grade: 7.9**

### Alex Brown, E

**Strengths:** Has good quickness and explosiveness. Can beat offensive tackles to the corner and collapses the pocket. Has nice variety of pass-rush moves and techniques. Can shed blockers and is good at chasing down plays.

**Weaknesses:** Sometimes loses concentration or becomes frustrated. Freelances and forgets his responsibilities at times. Lacks the strength to hold up vs. double-teams.

**Bottom line:** Brown has the potential to keep improving, but he'll face a challenge from Mark Anderson for the starting job. **Grade: 7.8**

### ↑ Mark Anderson, E

**Strengths:** Quick off the ball and has the speed to get around the corner. Shows good body control and change of direction. A relentless pass rusher who plays with good technique.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to add bulk and lower-body strength to be an every-down end. Must develop a presence at the point of attack.

**Bottom line:** Anderson's role likely will increase after he record 12 sacks in limited playing time as a rookie. **Grade: 7.8**

### ↑ Tommie Harris, T

**Strengths:** An explosive player with great anticipation and a powerful upper body. A great one-gap lineman who will beat opponents with quickness. Disruptive in running lanes. Works hard to shed blockers. Excels on slants and line stunts because of his quickness.

**Weaknesses:** Vulnerable to cut blocks and occasionally fails to finish plays. Sometimes runs past ballcarriers.

Must do a better job of reading blockers and finding the ball after penetrating.

**Bottom line:** Harris is the best tackle in the NFL and, with all due respect to Brian Urlacher, is quickly becoming the best player on the Bears' defense. **Grade: 9.4**

### ↓ Tank Johnson, T

**Strengths:** Has a strong lower body and comes off the ball with good leverage to hold the point of attack. Uses his hands to slap away the blocker's punch and can press the pocket with power or quickness.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to improve upper-body strength. Can be bounced when he gets moving laterally and is high. Off-field issues are a concern.

**Bottom line:** Johnson is a good fit for the Bears' attacking scheme and creates pressure on the passer from the inside, but his off-field issues could mar his 2007 season. **Grade: 6.7**

### Brian Urlacher, LB

**Strengths:** Has great size and athleticism. A smooth runner with good quickness. Uses his hands well, is explosive and rarely gets tied up in traffic. Gets to the ball aggressively and excels at diagnosing plays and getting in position. Has good awareness in zone coverage and adequate speed to run with backs and tight ends in man coverage.

**Weaknesses:** Blockers occasionally can get into his legs. Too eager to make plays at times. Can get out of position on play-action.

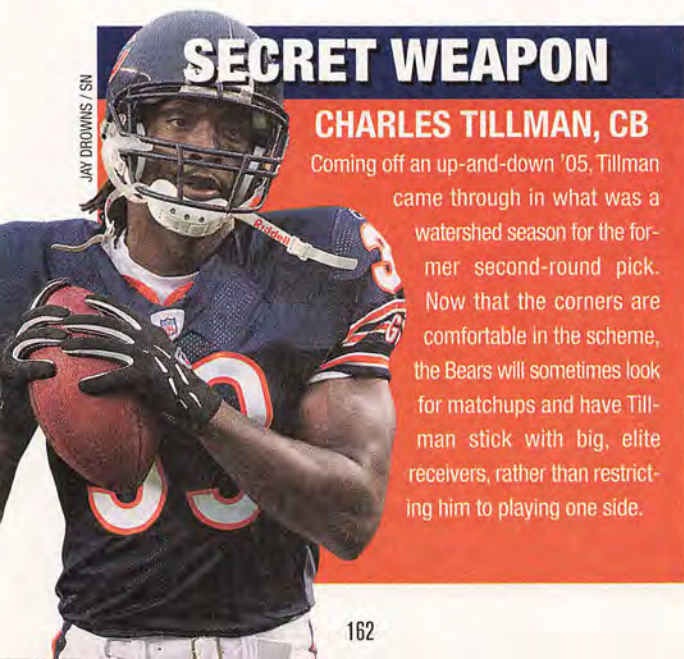
**Bottom line:** A playmaker who is always around the ball and is asked to do many different things in the middle of the Bears' cover 2, Urlacher is the best player at his position in the NFL. **Grade: 9.3**

### Lance Briggs, LB

**Strengths:** Quick and agile with little wasted motion. Shows good awareness in zone coverage and rarely is out of position. Can disrupt and reroute tight ends. Can shed blockers and is a strong tackler.

**Weaknesses:** Will get engulfed by bigger men when he turns his shoulder into the blocker. Doesn't always play with good awareness for cut blocks.

**Bottom line:** Briggs has developed into one of the top defensive players in the league. Although he plays in Brian



## SECRET WEAPON

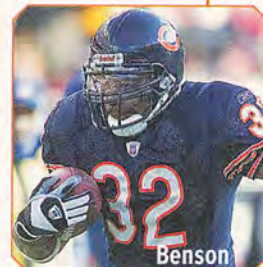
### CHARLES TILLMAN, CB

Coming off an up-and-down '05, Tillman came through in what was a watershed season for the former second-round pick. Now that the corners are comfortable in the scheme, the Bears will sometimes look for matchups and have Tillman stick with big, elite receivers, rather than restricting him to playing one side.

## SCOUT TAKES

## A scout from another team sizes up the Bears

I don't think **Cedric Benson** can be successful as a workhorse back. He hasn't shown, mentally or physically, that he can be the guy. ... I don't know if **Rex Grossman** will establish himself as their quarterback for years to come, but I think you'll see more consistent improvement from him in the reads and throws he makes. Last year was a lot of goods, a whole lot of bads and not many middles. I'd guess you'll see more middles this year. ... **Mark Anderson** is an excellent fit for what they do defensively. Explosive off the ball, instinctive, a playmaker. He'll continue to get a lot of sacks for a long time to come. ... The closer **Brian Urlacher** plays to the line, the more problems he has because he gets caught up in traffic. His game is about speed and being able to run. He can't do that close to the line because they get to him too fast.



JAY DROWNS / SN

deep off the ball in the cover 2 scheme and could get more chances to be a playmaker with Babich calling the plays. Urlacher's ability often forces the action away from him, but he still finds a way to lead the team in tackles every year.

Briggs remains a talented if unhappy sidekick. He has tremendous range and is a sure tackler who rarely is out of position. Briggs also has been durable, which can be said of strongside linebacker Hunter Hillenmeyer, who plays the run well and is adequate in coverage, as well. Hillenmeyer is a smart defender, and the group's communication generally is seamless.

Jamar Williams is an intriguing prospect who could step in if Briggs departs. He lacks Briggs' playing speed, but he's aggressive, takes on blocks well and could emerge as a leader one day. Brendon Ayanbadejo will be the strongside backup as long as he remains one of the league's premier special teams performers. Rod Wilson is decent when he drops into coverage, but he needs to shed blockers better. **GRADE: A**

**Secondary**—This unit took a step forward in '06. Many felt cornerback Charles Tillman deserved Pro Bowl recognition, just as fellow cornerback Nathan Vasher did in 2005. Both players are entering contract years and are primed for big paydays, but because the scheme puts a greater premium on line play, the Bears are not expected to make long-term commitments to both players. Look for Tillman to stick around. Ricky Manning fit in nicely as the nickel cornerback, but he struggled when he had to play on the outside.

The defense took a big hit when strong safety Mike Brown was lost to a torn foot ligament after six games. He not only is a solid in-the-box safety, he also is the emotional leader of the team on the field and in the locker room. If Brown is not ready when the season begins, Adam Archuleta, an offseason acquisition from the Redskins, likely will start at strong safety and Danieal Manning will be the free safety. Archuleta's career took off under Smith in St. Louis, and the question is: Was he just a

Urlacher's shadow, he is nearly on par in terms of ability. **Grade: 8.6**

## Nathan Vasher, CB

**Strengths:** Has excellent speed and quickness, and can run with most receivers. Plays taller than his size because of his explosiveness and leaping ability. Makes plays from sideline to sideline.

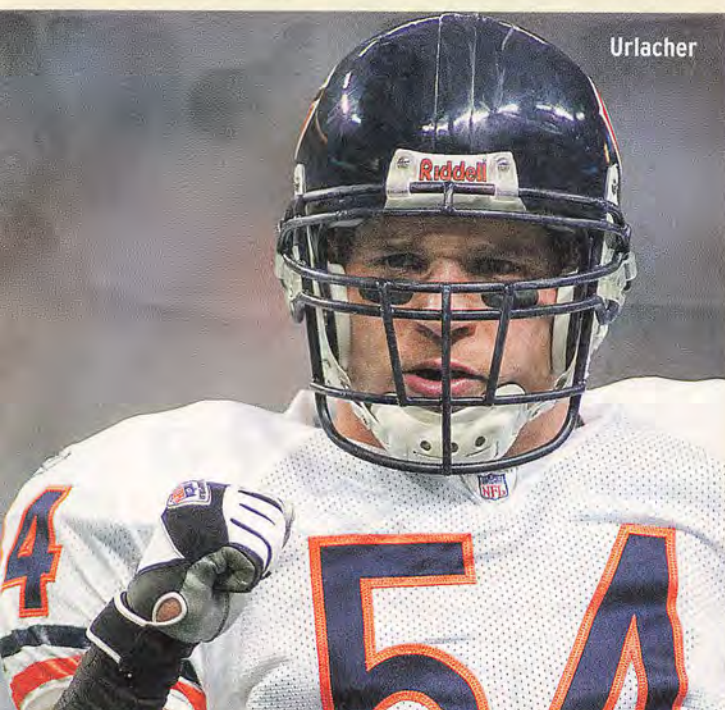
**Weaknesses:** Lacks upper-body strength. A willing tackler but must improve his timing taking on blockers

## Adam Archuleta, S

**Strengths:** Fills hard against the run. Gets through traffic and moves to the ball quickly. Explodes into hits and forces fumbles. Shows good range and burst to the ball in zone coverage. Anticipates snaps and is an efficient and effective blitz.

**Weaknesses:** Can be too aggressive and lacks recognition skills. Misses some tackles going for the big hit. Doesn't have great ball skills.

**Bottom line:** Archuleta plays the run



Urlacher

MATTHEW KUTZ / SN ARCHIVES

and exploding through ballcarriers. Takes poor angles in run support.

**Bottom line:** Vasher is an excellent athlete who will make plays on the ball and continue to thrive in the Bears' aggressive scheme. **Grade: 7.9**

## Charles Tillman, CB

**Strengths:** Great burst and excellent speed allow him to run with anybody. Excels in press coverage and can muscle receivers out of routes. Uses his hands well and can shed blockers and make tackles.

**Weaknesses:** Gets a little high in his backpedal and will get his feet tangled. Lacks the ability to change directions without losing speed in transition.

**Bottom line:** Tillman must be more consistent and work at becoming a complete player, not just a playmaking ballhawk. **Grade: 7.6**

very well and is best suited to a cover 2 scheme when in coverage.

**Grade: 7.5**

## Danieal Manning, S

**Strengths:** Has versatility, adequate size and speed. Good in run support; a solid tackler who wraps up the ballcarrier. Changes direction without losing much speed. A natural playmaker and a threat to score on any interception.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks proper mechanics to excel. Needs to improve his read-and-react skills and must learn to diagnose plays quickly.

**Bottom line:** Manning will make plays with his athletic ability, but will make mistakes until he plays with more intelligence and better instincts. **Grade: 6.8**

bad fit in Washington? Manning is rangy and had a solid rookie season, but he didn't prove to be the tackler needed against the run and may eventually find a home on the outside as a cornerback. When Brown is healthy, the plan is for him to move back to free safety and Archuleta to play strong safety because Brown has better coverage skills.

Chris Harris remains a durable backup who is best suited to strong safety but can be a liability in coverage. Dante Wesley is a productive special teams player and could play corner in an emergency. If rookie safety Kevin Payne can learn the defense, he could carve out a role as a run stopper because he's a rugged and sure tackler. **GRADE: B**

## SPECIAL TEAMS

Devin Hester's debut turned out to be the most electric season ever for a return man.

Hester had six returns for touchdowns in the regular season and returned the opening kickoff in the Super Bowl for a TD, proving he was more than worthy of a second-round draft pick. He gives the Bears a weapon every time they line up to receive a punt or kick, and there's more than just a little buzz about adding wide receiver to his repertoire.

Second-year kicker Robbie Gould went to the Pro Bowl after making 32 of 36 field goal attempts, including 12 of 14 from 40 to 49 yards. Gould possesses a strong leg for kickoffs but has yet to attempt a 50-yard field goal. Punter Brad Maynard had the third-best season of his career in terms of net average and remains steady.

Patrick Mannelly completed his ninth consecutive season as the team's long snapper and remains a pillar of consistency. Coverage ace Ayanbadejo was picked to go to the Pro Bowl last season.

**GRADE: A**

## STADIUM/MEDIA

Soldier Field (61,500, grass)

Tickets: 847-615-2327

Training camp: Olivet Nazarene University, Bourbonnais, Ill.; 815-928-5821

Radio: WBBM Radio 780 AM

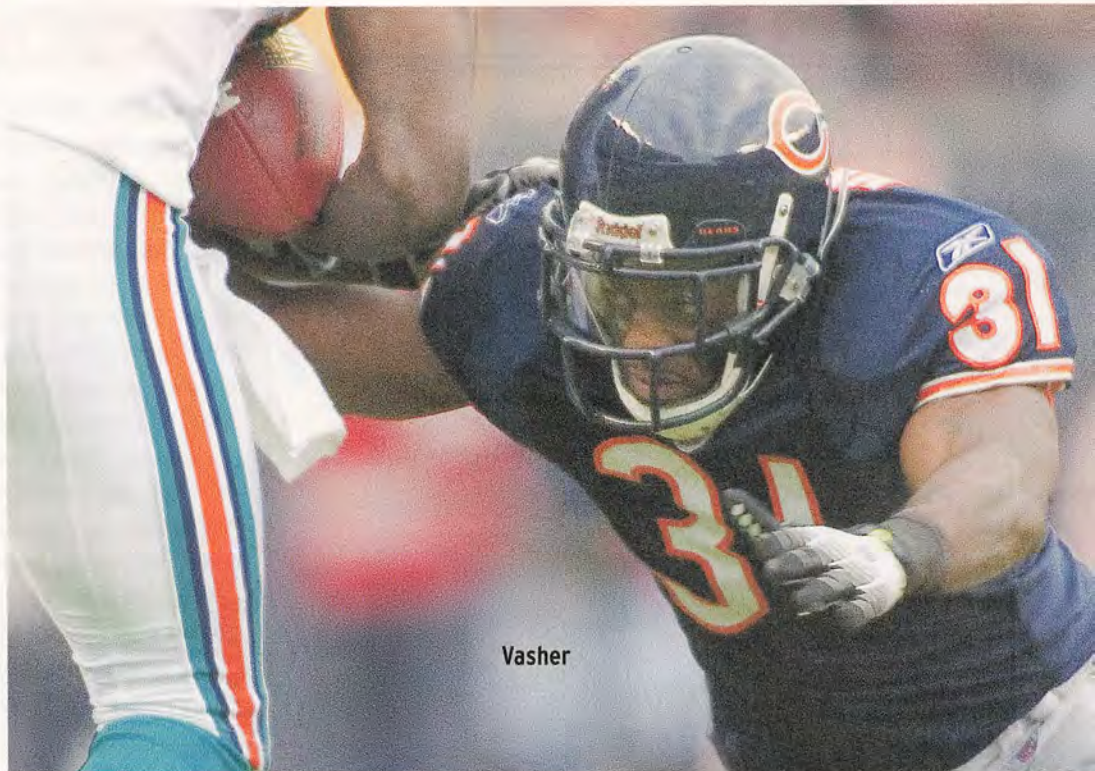
Website: chicagobears.com

## BOTTOM LINE

As Smith says, the bar has been set high. The team has made great strides in each of his first three seasons, but the Bears face a challenging schedule with bull's-eyes on their backs. They've proved they can win on the road and handle the spotlight, and the competition in the NFC North remains subpar. The Bears will win the division for the third straight year, but history says returning to the Super Bowl for a shot at redemption figures to be a tall order—especially if Grossman remains inconsistent.

SN

Brad Biggs covers the Bears for the Chicago Sun-Times.



Vasher

## KEY MOVES

### 2007 DRAFT PICKS

Rd.-Pick

**GRADE B**

1-31 Greg Olsen, TE, Miami

Has the speed to stretch the field and will diversify the offense.

2-62 Dan Bazuin, DE, Central Michigan

Quick, undersized end must prove he can handle the run.

3-93 Garrett Wolfe, RB, Northern Illinois

Change-of-pace back is small but quick and durable.

3-94 Michael Okwo, LB, Stanford

Still must show he is durable and has the necessary coverage skills.

4-130 Josh Beekman, G/C, Boston College

Versatile future building block for an aging line.

5-167 Kevin Payne, S, Louisiana-Monroe

Physical safety is expected to be a rugged run defender.

5-168 Corey Graham, CB, New Hampshire

Size (6-0, 195) makes him ideal for a cover 2 scheme.

7-221 Trumaine McBride, CB, Mississippi

Must stand out on special teams to stick.

7-241 Aaron Brant, OT, Iowa State

Has size (6-6, 320) but must refine his skills to make the roster.

## VETERAN PLAYERS

**Additions:** DT Anthony Adams (FA/49ers), S Adam Archuleta (trade/Redskins).

**Losses:** DT Alfonso Boone (FA/Chiefs), WR Justin Gage (FA/Titans), S Todd Johnson (FA/Rams), RB Thomas Jones (trade/Jets), DT Ian Scott (FA/Eagles), S Cameron Worrell (FA/Dolphins).

## PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
QB	● Rex Grossman ● Brian Griese ● Jason McKie □ J.D. Runnels	LE	■ Adewale Ogunleye ● Dan Bazuin ● Tank Johnson □ Anthony Adams
RB	● Cedric Benson ● Adrian Peterson	RT	▲ Tommie Harris □ Antonio Garay
WR	■ Bernard Berrian □ Mark Bradley	RE	■ Alex Brown ■ Mark Anderson
WR	● Muhsin Muhammad □ Rashied Davis	SLB	● Hunter Hillenmeyer □ Brendon Ayanbadejo
TE	● Desmond Clark ● Greg Olsen	MLB	▲ Brian Urlacher □ Rod Wilson
LT	■ John Tait □ John St. Clair	WLB	▲ Lance Briggs □ Jamar Williams
LG	● Ruben Brown ● Terrence Metcalf	LCB	■ Charles Tillman ● Ricky Manning
C	▲ Olin Kreutz □ Anthony Oakley	SS	● Adam Archuleta ■ Mike Brown
RG	■ Roberto Garza ● Terrence Metcalf	FS	● Danieal Manning □ Chris Harris
RT	■ Fred Miller □ John St. Clair	RCB	■ Nathan Vasher □ Dante Wesley

## SPECIALISTS

K	■ Robbie Gould	KR	▲ Devin Hester
P	● Brad Maynard	PR	▲ Devin Hester
		LS	▲ Patrick Mannelly

▲ Elite ■ Solid ● Adequate □ Fringe

Depth charts updated weekly at [sportingnews.com](http://sportingnews.com)

## BEARS ROSTER

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL exp.	College	How acq.	2006 GP/GS
QUARTERBACKS							
14	Brian Griese	6-3/214	3/18/75	10	Michigan	W-TB/06	6/0
8	Rex Grossman	6-1/218	8/23/80	5	Florida	D1b/03	16/16
18	Kyle Orton	6-4/217	11/14/82	3	Purdue	D4/05	0/0
17	J.T. O'Sullivan	6-2/227	8/25/79	6	Cal-Davis	FA/07	0/0
RUNNING BACKS							
32	Cedric Benson	5-11/220	12/28/82	3	Texas	D1/05	15/0
37	Jason McKie (FB)	5-11/243	5/22/80	6	Temple	FA/02	15/12
29	Adrian Peterson	5-10/210	7/1/79	6	Georgia Southern	D6a/02	16/0
45	Gerald Riggs	5-11/229	9/28/83	1	Tennessee	FA/06	0/0
48	J.D. Runnels (FB)	5-11/240	6/19/84	2	Oklahoma	D6a/06	2/0
25	Garrett Wolfe	5-7/186	8/17/84	R	Northern Illinois	D3a/07	—
RECEIVERS							
86	Richard Angulo (TE)	6-7/260	8/13/80	3	West. New Mexico	FA/06	0/0
80	Bernard Berrian	6-1/185	12/27/80	4	Fresno State	D3/04	15/14
16	Mark Bradley	6-2/198	1/29/82	3	Oklahoma	D2/05	10/0
88	Desmond Clark (TE)	6-3/249	4/20/77	9	Wake Forest	FA/03	16/16
81	Rashied Davis	5-9/183	7/24/79	3	San Jose State	FA/05	16/2
85	John Gilmore (TE)	6-5/257	9/21/79	6	Penn State	FA/02	16/3
23	Devin Hester	5-11/186	11/4/82	2	Miami	D2b/06	16/0
83	Mike Hass	6-1/209	1/2/83	2	Oregon State	FA/06	0/0
87	Muhsin Muhammad	6-2/217	5/5/73	12	Michigan State	FA/05	16/16
82	Greg Olsen (TE)	6-6/254	3/11/85	R	Miami	D1/07	—
84	Brandon Rideau	6-3/200	10/18/82	3	Kansas	FA/06	0/0
OFFENSIVE LINEMEN							
67	Josh Beekman (G/C)	6-2/313	6/30/83	R	Boston College	D4/07	—
70	Aaron Brant (T)	6-7/319	9/16/84	R	Iowa State	D7b/07	—
74	Ruben Brown (G)	6-3/300	2/13/72	13	Pittsburgh	FA/04	16/16
63	Roberto Garza (G/C)	6-2/305	3/26/79	7	Texas A&M-Kingsville	FA/05	16/16
57	Olin Kreutz (C)	6-2/292	6/9/77	10	Washington	D3/98	16/16
75	Mark LeVoir (T)	6-7/310	7/29/82	1	Notre Dame	FA/06	0/0
65	Patrick Mannelly (LS)	6-5/265	4/18/75	10	Duke	D6b/98	16/0
62	Tyler McMeans (G)	6-4/325	4/4/80	1	Miami	FA/07	0/0
60	Terrence Metcalf (G)	6-3/318	1/28/78	6	Mississippi	D3b/02	16/0
69	Fred Miller (T)	6-7/314	2/6/73	12	Baylor	FA/05	16/16
68	Anthony Oakley (G/C)	6-4/298	8/16/81	2	Western Kentucky	FA/06	0/0
64	Tyler Reed (G)	6-4/307	10/6/82	2	Penn State	D6b/06	0/0
78	John St. Clair (T)	6-4/320	7/31/77	8	Virginia	FA/05	16/2
76	John Tait (T)	6-6/315	1/26/75	9	Brigham Young	FA/04	14/14
DEFENSIVE LINEMEN							
73	Anthony Adams (T)	6-0/300	6/18/80	5	Penn State	D2/03	14/5
97	Mark Anderson (E)	6-4/254	5/26/83	2	Alabama	D5/06	16/1
99	Dan Bazuin (E)	6-3/266	7/22/83	R	Central Michigan	D2/07	—
96	Alex Brown (E)	6-3/262	6/4/79	6	Florida	D4/02	16/16
72	Copeland Bryan (E)	6-3/253	7/14/83	1	Arizona	FA/06	0/0
98	Dusty Dvoracek (T)	6-3/301	3/3/81	1	Oklahoma	D3/06	0/0
90	Antonio Garay (T)	6-4/303	11/30/79	3	Boston College	FA/06	4/0
91	Tommie Harris (T)	6-3/300	4/29/83	4	Oklahoma	D1/04	12/11
71	Israel Idonijie (T)	6-6/270	11/17/80	4	Manitoba	FA/03	13/1
99	Tank Johnson (T)	6-3/300	12/7/81	4	Washington	D2/04	14/10
93	Adewale Ogunleye (E)	6-4/260	8/9/77	7	Indiana	T-Mia/04	14/14
LINEBACKERS							
94	Brendon Ayanbadejo	6-1/230	9/6/76	5	UCLA	T-Mia/05	16/1
55	Lance Briggs	6-1/238	11/12/80	5	Arizona	D3/03	16/16
52	Hunter Hillenmeyer	6-4/238	10/28/80	5	Vanderbilt	FA/03	15/13
53	Leon Joe	6-1/230	10/26/81	4	Maryland	W-Ari/05	9/0
58	Darrell McClover	6-2/226	8/25/81	4	Miami	FA/06	7/0
62	Michael Okwo	5-11/232	1/24/85	R	Stanford	D3b/07	—
54	Brian Urlacher	6-4/258	5/25/78	8	New Mexico	D1/00	16/16
52	Jamar Williams	6-0/236	6/14/84	2	Arizona State	D4/06	3/0
59	Rod Wilson	6-2/230	11/12/81	2	Southern California	D7/05	13/0
DEFENSIVE BACKS							
20	Adam Archuleta (S)	6-0/223	11/27/77	7	Arizona State	T-Was/07	16/7
30	Mike Brown (S)	5-10/207	2/13/78	8	Nebraska	D2/00	6/6
22	Tyler Everett (S)	5-11/202	11/4/83	2	Ohio State	FA/06	3/0
35	Corey Graham (CB)	6-0/195	7/25/85	R	New Hampshire	D5b/07	—
46	Chris Harris (S)	6-0/206	8/6/82	3	Louisiana-Monroe	D6/05	11/7
38	Danieal Manning (S)	5-11/196	8/9/82	2	Abilene Christian	D2a/06	16/14
24	Ricky Manning (CB)	5-9/185	11/18/80	5	UCLA	FA/06	15/6
26	Trumaine McBride (CB)	5-9/185	9/24/85	R	Mississippi	D7a/07	—
36	Brandon McGowan (S)	5-11/205	9/16/83	3	Maine	FA/05	1/0
44	Kevin Payne (S)	6-0/220	12/5/83	R	La-Monroe	D5a/07	—
33	Charles Tillman (CB)	6-1/196	2/23/81	5	La-Lafayette	D2/03	14/14
31	Nathan Vasher (CB)	5-10/180	11/17/81	4	Texas	D4a/04	14/13
21	Dante Wesley (CB)	6-1/211	4/5/79	6	Arkansas-Pine Bluff	FA/06	13/0
SPECIALISTS							
9	Robbie Gould (K)	6-0/181	12/6/82	3	Penn State	FA/05	16/0
4	Brad Maynard (P)	6-1/186	2/9/74	10	Ball State	FA/01	16/0
1	Nick Novak (K)	6-0/189	8/21/81	4	Maryland	FA/07	6/0

Abbreviations: D1-draft pick, first round; W-claimed on waivers; T-obtained in trade; FA-free-agent acquisition.



Anderson

JAY DROWNS / SN

MATTHEW KUTZ / SN ARCHIVES



DALLAS

NFC

# COWBOYS

If Phillips can put the Doomsday back in Dallas, this team could make a deep playoff run

**SN PICK** 1st, NFC East (13-3)

BY JEAN-JACQUES TAYLOR

**B**ill Parcells is gone after four seasons without a playoff win. Still, he left the Cowboys in much better shape than they were when he arrived. This is the Cowboys' most talented team in years. In Tony Romo, the team has a quarterback who is capable of leading it deep into the playoffs.

Owner Jerry Jones hired Wade Phillips as Parcells' replacement instead of Norv Turner for one reason: Phillips' prowess as a defensive coordinator. Jones believes the Cowboys have the personnel to have a dominant 3-4 defense, and he thinks Phillips' aggressive style will get the most from the players.

There are high hopes in Dallas that the Cowboys can erase the memories of last season's playoff collapse and win in the postseason for the first time in a decade.

## OFFENSE

Though the Cowboys ranked fourth among NFL teams in points per game last season, they took a risk and tinkered with the offense. They declined to re-sign passing game coordinator Todd Haley and took play-calling duties away from Tony Sparano. Then they turned the offense over to Jason Garrett, who had been an NFL assistant for just two years before the Cowboys hired him as coordinator. Garrett will run the same base offense the Cowboys used last year, and the emphasis will continue to be on spreading the ball around. Dallas again will use its two-pronged running attack, though it will rely more on man-to-man blocking instead of the zone-blocking scheme it used much of last season.

**Quarterbacks**—Romo, an undrafted free agent, replaced Drew Bledsoe after a 3-3 start last season and led the Cowboys to the playoffs. Since his rookie year in 2003, Romo has overhauled his throwing motion—he now has more of an over-the-top delivery—and increased his accuracy. He is especially accurate when throwing on the move, so don't be surprised if Garrett adds more roll-

## SCHEDULE

All times Eastern

Sept. 9	N.Y. GIANTS	8:15
Sept. 16	at Miami	4:05
Sept. 23	at Chicago	8:15
Sept. 30	ST. LOUIS	1:00
Oct. 8	at Buffalo*	8:30
Oct. 14	NEW ENGLAND	4:15
Oct. 21	MINNESOTA	1:00
Oct. 28	Open date	
Nov. 4	at Philadelphia	8:15
Nov. 11	at N.Y. Giants	4:15
Nov. 18	WASHINGTON	1:00
Nov. 22	N.Y. JETS†	4:15
Nov. 29	GREEN BAY†	8:15
Dec. 9	at Detroit	1:00
Dec. 16	PHILADELPHIA	4:15
Dec. 22	at Carolina††	8:15
Dec. 30	at Washington	1:00

Strength of schedule: T-21st

\*Monday

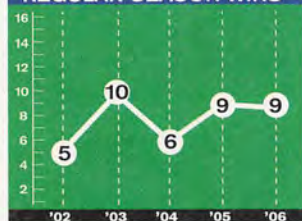
†Thursday

††Saturday

Analysis of every Cowboys game:

[sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom](http://sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom)

## REGULAR-SEASON WINS



Romo





TOM HAUCK FOR SN

outs or bootlegs. Romo has good speed and quickness, which enables him to escape pressure. He's also elusive enough to convert third downs with his legs when he has to. He tends to gamble, though, and must do a better job of protecting the ball when he's in the pocket.

The Cowboys signed veteran Brad Johnson to serve as Romo's backup. Johnson struggled with the Vikings last season, and no longer is viewed as a viable starter. He has lost arm strength and mobility, but he still knows where to go with his throws. He takes care of the ball, and Dallas has enough offensive weapons that he wouldn't have the pressure of carrying the offense if pressed into a starting role.

Third-string quarterback Matt Baker spent last season on the practice squad. The Cowboys like his athleticism and arm strength, so he'll get a chance to earn a roster spot. **GRADE: B**

**Running backs**—Julius Jones wants to be the lead running back, and he wants to get more than 300 carries. The problem is Marion Barber is too good to ride the bench.

The two-back approach actually is a good system for Jones because he tends to wear down late in the season. He has proved he can be an explosive runner with his game-breaking speed, but he misses too many holes and doesn't consistently break enough tackles to be a good short-yardage runner. That's where Barber comes in. He ran for 14 touchdowns and averaged 4.8 yards per carry last season as the Cowboys' goal-line and third-down back.

Tyson Thompson, a speed back, remains an intriguing player after missing a chunk of 2006 with a broken leg. His role as a backup is not expected to change.

At fullback, Oliver Hoyte and Lousaka Polite will compete with sixth-round pick Deon Anderson for the starting job. Hoyte is inexperienced but more physical than Polite, who is

## SCOUT TAKES

### A scout from another team sizes up the Cowboys

I think their defense will be a more aggressive form of the 3-4 under **Wade Phillips**. It will involve more blitzing with line-backers and safeties, and they'll try to add a little more confusion than what they've had the past couple of years. The way **Bill Parcells** ran it, it was a base 3-4—just trying to be physical up front and not really trying to fool anybody. ... **Tony Romo** is going to get better with more experience, but when things aren't going his way, he just needs to fight through it and snap out of it. ... **Roy Williams** is pretty close to being a dominant in-the-box player. The problem has come when he has been asked to cover more ground. I'm sure they'll try to play to his strengths and limit his weaknesses. ... Moving **Leonard Davis** to guard is a smart thing. That's his best position. I thought he was really good in his rookie year when he played there.

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Davis

intelligent and strong and better at taking proper angles to blocks and maintaining leverage. Anderson is a classic battering-ram fullback with few running skills. **GRADE: B**

**Receivers**—Terry Glenn, Terrell Owens and tight end Jason Witten give the Cowboys one of the NFL's most explosive receiving units. All have the ability to make big plays, and Romo throws to the open man rather than forcing the ball to one player. The only real knock on the group is age; Glenn and Owens will be 33 when the season begins.

Last season, Owens led the league in receiving touchdowns (13) and drops (18) while catching 85 passes for 1,180 yards. The Cowboys want to get him the ball on the crossing routes more often to take advantage of his run-after-the-catch skills.

Glenn, who also surpassed the 1,000-yard mark, is one of the league's top deep threats. He spent a lot of time in the offseason improving his conditioning and increasing his strength.

Witten creates problems for defensive coordinators because he's too big for safeties to cover and too fast for linebackers. He deftly works the middle of the field and gives Romo a big target for converting on third down.

Patrick Crayton, the No. 3 receiver, probably has the best hands on the team, and he can make the first tackler miss. He usually works the middle of the field. The club also is high on Sam Hurd and Miles Austin, a pair of intriguing undrafted free agents who made the team last year.

Backup tight end Anthony Fasano is a solid receiver who does a good job of finding soft spots in zones. The Cowboys can use him in motion and as a lead blocker. **GRADE: A-**

**Line**—Jones has spent a lot of money to give Dallas a line that can wear down defenses.

Right guard Leonard Davis, the most significant offseason acquisition, is the key. Labeled an underachiever in Arizona, Davis is lethal if he gets his hands on a defender. He'll play alongside tackle Marc Colombo, a tough, gritty player who impressed the Cowboys with his work ethic and determination after a knee injury nearly ruined his career.

Dallas is looking to center Andre Gurode to bring stability to the line. He has improved considerably at recognizing defenses

## SCOUTING REPORTS: OFFENSE

### ↑ Tony Romo, QB

**Strengths:** Has good size and adequate arm strength and can throw into tight spaces. Has good touch on his throws. Understands coverages and is smart in the pocket. Adequate at throwing on the run and can buy time with his legs.

**Weaknesses:** A bit short. Must continue to improve his throwing technique and mechanics when dropping back from center.

**Bottom line:** Romo burst onto the scene in 2006 and gained valuable experience. He has the tools to be a solid starter but must prove he is more than a one-hit wonder. **Grade: 6.7**

### ↑ Julius Jones, RB

**Strengths:** Attacks the line when he locates a seam. Decisive and explodes through holes. Can change direction quickly and turn the corner. Has a second gear in the open field. Makes defenders miss. Runs with good balance. Can make spectacular catches. A willing blocker.

**Weaknesses:** Durability is a big concern. Must improve ball security. Lacks size and lower-body strength. Inexperienced as a pass blocker.

**Bottom line:** Jones is coming off his first 1,000-yard season, but he must continue to make the most of his chances because Marion Barber's role will continue to increase. **Grade: 7.1**

### Marion Barber, RB

**Strengths:** A strong inside runner who has enough burst to hit the hole and explode to the second level. Shifty in the open field. Runs with good pad level and can break tackles with extra effort. A dangerous scoring threat near the goal line. Has excellent hands as a receiver out of the backfield.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks game-breaking speed. Has ball security issues.

**Bottom line:** As he gains experience, Barber has been getting more opportunities, and his versatility makes it hard to take him off the field. **Grade: 6.9**

### Terrell Owens, WR

**Strengths:** A remarkable physical specimen and a very powerful receiver with strong hands. Builds up to top speed quickly; a long strider. Outstanding in the red zone and in jump-ball situations. Uses his size to create separation. Very strong runner after the catch; can break tackles.

**Weaknesses:** Average route runner.

Struggles to sit down in routes. Often drops easy passes because of a lack of concentration.

**Bottom line:** Though his attitude is an obvious concern, Owens remains an elite playmaker. He demands constant double-teams and is a threat to score every time he makes a catch. But he must make an effort to get with Wade Phillips' program if he hopes to remain in Dallas. **Grade: 9.0**

### Terry Glenn, WR

**Strengths:** Explodes off the line and reaches top speed quickly. Has a second gear when tracking balls downfield. Unusual body control allows him to make spectacular catches. Can run crisp short-to-intermediate routes and create separation in man coverage.

**Weaknesses:** Undersized; physical corners can muscle him out of routes. Takes plays off and is a poor blocker. Has had injury issues.

**Bottom line:** Glenn is a legitimate scoring threat. He's an outstanding deep-ball player who relies on outstanding speed. **Grade: 7.5**

### ↑ Jason Witten, TE

**Strengths:** Quick and difficult to jam at the line. Can work seams and make tough catches. Has good body control and can adjust to passes. Developing into an upper-tier red zone target. A powerful open-field runner. Sells blocks before releasing on play-action.

**Weaknesses:** Has problems picking up blitzes and line stunts. Lacks lower-body strength. Will struggle against two-gap ends and won't push the pile in short-yardage situations.

**Bottom line:** Witten has become one of the NFL's top tight ends. He's the total package. **Grade: 8.5**

### Flozell Adams, T

**Strengths:** Engulfs undersized defenders at point of attack; can drive them off the ball. Seldom loses a battle once he locks on to a defender. Uses his long arms to force edge rushers to take wider angles to the quarterback. Versatile, durable and fairly agile.

**Weaknesses:** Footwork is inconsistent. Vulnerable to double moves. Slow out of his stance; superior edge rushers can turn the corner against him. Lacks the range to pull or trap; not comfortable in space. Takes poor angles to blocks.

**Bottom line:** Adams does not always look pretty, but he holds the left side

## FANTASY SOURCE PICKS

**STUD**  
WR Terrell Owens

**STUMBLER**  
RB Julius Jones

**BEST RED ZONE THREAT**  
RB Marion Barber ▶

**COMEBACK CANDIDATE**  
TE Jason Witten

Fantasy Source Football is your online fantasy authority.  
Go to [fantasy.sportingnews.com/nfl](http://fantasy.sportingnews.com/nfl).

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Players are graded by War Room scouts on a 1-10 scale.  
*\*Rookies (not graded)*

down and plays the game with passion. **Grade: 7.7**

#### ↓ Marc Colombo, T

**Strengths:** Has excellent size and the quickness to come off the ball and deliver a blow. Can keep defenders away from his body. Rides edge rushers past the quarterback. Plays with a good base and maintains leverage.  
**Weaknesses:** Lacks strength. Struggles to finish blocks and maintain contact. Must use perfect technique to compete with big linemen.

**Bottom line:** Colombo is competitive but struggles with the power part of the game and is injury-prone. **Grade: 6.0**

#### ↑ Kyle Kosier, G

**Strengths:** An outstanding, versatile athlete with quick feet. Can play both guard and both tackle positions. Very smart; plays under control. Has powerful hands and plays with outstanding leverage. Has a mean streak.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks overall strength. Average as a pulling player. More of a tie-up blocker in space.

**Bottom line:** Kosier was an instant

upgrade to the line in '06. **Grade: 8.0**

#### ↑ Leonard Davis, G

**Strengths:** Has unbelievable strength and power and dominates once he locks up an opponent. Can handle any type of bull rush and has excellent run-blocking and straight-ahead power.

**Weaknesses:** Has limited athleticism and quickness. Not good in space and doesn't make plays on the second level.

**Bottom line:** Davis has exceptional toughness, and playing with a better unit will only help his game. **Grade: 7.8**

#### Andre Gurode, C

**Strengths:** Drives defenders off the ball. Plays with intensity; sustains blocks. Can adjust to line stunts and blitzes. Maintains separation and forces defenders away from the pocket. seldom gives ground to bull rushers.

**Weaknesses:** Balance is poor. Turns shoulders in pass protection and creates rush lanes for defenders. Lacks lateral mobility. Durability is an issue.

**Bottom line:** Gurode is improving, and a strong supporting cast will help him.

**Grade: 6.7**



Witten

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**KEY:** ↑ Ascending ↓ Descending

## INSIDERS POLL

**Under Wade Phillips, Terrell Owens will be a:**

Well-behaved TD machine

Misbehaving TD machine

Misbehaving on-field disappointment



Based on a poll of SN's 32 team correspondents

## BOLD PREDICTIONS

**1** WR Terrell Owens will become a bigger distraction this season than he ever was in his first year with the Cowboys because there's no Bill Parcells-like presence on the coaching staff to keep him in check.

**2** QB Tony Romo will prove that his 2006 breakout performance was no fluke. He'll get to the Pro Bowl again and pass for more than 3,000 yards in his first season as a full-time starter.

**3** In Wade Phillips' aggressive, blitzing defense, LB DeMarcus Ware will have 15 sacks—an increase of 4½ over last year.

and helping Romo decide whether to change the play at the line. At left tackle, Flozell Adams is expected to have an outstanding season. He's big, and his long arms keep defenders off of him. When motivated, he's one of the best run blockers in the league. Kyle Kosier will start at left guard. He's a battler who does a good job of getting to the second level and attacking linebackers.

Because the team spent so much money on the starters, the backups are either aging or inexperienced. Guards Joe Berger and Cory Procter and tackle Pat McQuistan all are unproven. The team took James Marten in the third round of the draft; he'll provide depth and insurance at tackle. He's a big guy who's expected to be a solid run blocker. The Cowboys don't have a backup for Gurode, so they'll need to add one before training camp begins. **GRADE: B-**

### DEFENSE

With Phillips in charge of the defense, look for the Cowboys to have a much more aggressive approach. They will use a one-gap scheme instead of the two-gap zone employed under Parcells, and the emphasis will be on attacking the quarterback.

**Line**—Ends Marcus Spears and Chris Canty will get an opportunity to prove they can be impact players. Spears, a 2005 first-round pick, was neutralized in Parcells' scheme because he couldn't use his quickness to shoot gaps. This year, he will be unleashed and allowed to attack. The same is true of Canty, who has shown flashes of being a playmaker. He has been good against the run but a nonfactor as a pass-rusher.

Backup end Jason Hatcher, a third-round pick in 2006, had 2½ sacks last season and showed he has the potential to be an excellent nickel pass rusher. But he'll need to be more of a factor against the run to move into the starting lineup.

At nose tackle, Jason Ferguson is a run stuffer. He's key to the 3-4. Backup Jay Ratliff is one of the Cowboys' most energetic players. He has a high motor and always seems to be around the ball. He can play anywhere on the line, which gives the coaches plenty of options. **GRADE: B**

**Linebackers**—With free agents and draft picks, the Cowboys shored up the most important position group in the 3-4. But it still has a significant hole.

On the outside, DeMarcus Ware earned his first Pro Bowl berth last season and is on the verge of being a star. He can rush the passer, cover and play the run equally well. But the Cowboys don't have another outside linebacker they can trust to rush the passer. Greg Ellis would fill the role, but he's coming off a torn Achilles' tendon and the coaches have no idea whether he still can be the high-level pass rusher the scheme needs. First-round pick Anthony Spencer needs to make the conversion from end to linebacker before he can fill the spot.

On the inside, Bradie James needs to have a solid season after struggling the second half of last year. The Cowboys think he can be more effective if they take him off the nickel defense and make him a two-down player. Akin Ayodele was one of the Cowboys' most productive players last season. He's intelligent, makes few mistakes and has proved he can be a three-down player.

Key backups Kevin Burnett and Bobby Carpenter, a first-round pick in 2006, will have important roles this season. Burnett, who has big-play potential because of his athleticism, will be a key performer in the nickel and dime. Dallas wants to move Carpenter around to take advantage of his versatility.

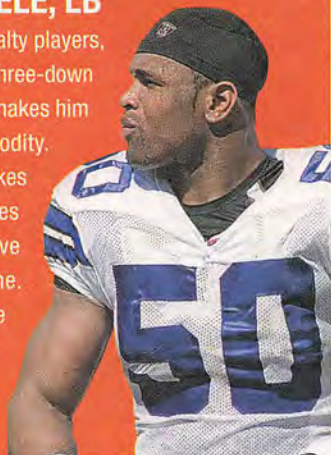
The Cowboys drafted Spencer because they need a dominant pass rusher at each outside position. Spencer will be a nickel rusher early in the season, but his role will evolve as he improves. He had 10½ sacks for Purdue last season, and top college tackles such as Joe Thomas and Levi Brown said Spencer was their most challenging opponent. **GRADE: B**

**Secondary**—The hope is that free safety Ken Hamlin will

## SECRET WEAPON

### AKIN AYODELE, LB

In this era of specialty players, Ayodele is a solid three-down linebacker, which makes him a valuable commodity. He's steady, he makes few mental mistakes and he is productive within the scheme. Ayodele is one of the most valuable players on the Cowboys' defense.



MATTHEW KUTZ / SN ARCHIVES

## SCOUTING REPORTS: DEFENSE

### ↑ Marcus Spears, E

**Strengths:** Has terrific quickness and change-of-direction skills. Has natural strength and uses his hands well to keep blockers at bay. Has a strong club move as a pass rusher.

**Weaknesses:** Has lost explosiveness; is more of a power player now. Needs to play with more consistent leverage to be even better against the run.

**Bottom line:** Spears struggled at the end of last season, and his inability to create upfield pressure hurt the pass rush. Wade Phillips' scheme will take advantage of Spears' quickness.

**Grade: 7.9**

### Chris Canty, E

**Strengths:** Has long arms and is strong at the point of attack. Uses good club and rip moves to free himself as a pass rusher. Has good athletic ability and plays with leverage.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to improve overall strength and lateral quickness. Inconsistent with hand usage.

**Bottom line:** Canty is a physical and athletic player who has the ability to be solid against the run and pass in Dallas' 3-4. **Grade: 6.7**

### Jason Ferguson, T

**Strengths:** Immovable once he has established position. Occupies blockers at the line of scrimmage; ability to anchor against double-teams helps free up other defenders. Has the upper-body strength to maintain separation. A powerful bull rusher who can collapse the pocket. Plays under control in space and makes open-field tackles.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks the quickness to consistently shoot inside. Loses balance when forced to change direction quickly. Lacks instincts. Wears down.

**Bottom line:** Conditioning always will be critical, but Ferguson is solid against the run and helps make Dallas' 3-4 defense go. **Grade: 7.8**

### ↑ DeMarcus Ware, LB

**Strengths:** Has good speed and is a good pass rusher. Uses his hands very well to gain leverage and sheds blocks well. Plays with good quickness. Will hold his ground when teams run at him.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to improve reactions and play recognition.

**Bottom line:** Ware is emerging as one of the top young defensive stars in the

game, and his best football is still in front of him. **Grade: 8.0**

### Akin Ayodele, LB

**Strengths:** Makes more plays than his athleticism would suggest. Has excellent size and very good playing speed. Can find the ball, uncoil and hit with excellent pop when tackling. Has good pass-rush ability.

**Weaknesses:** Limited in coverage. Sometimes has trouble playing over blockers. Needs to wrap up and finish tackles; will miss tackles in the open field.

**Bottom line:** Ayodele is at his best defending the power running game. He has been a solid addition to the defense. **Grade: 7.4**

### Greg Ellis, LB

**Strengths:** Takes good angles to the ball. Gets through traffic quickly. Runs well for his size and has good lateral mobility. Generally wraps up on contact. Can run around offensive tackles and shows good burst to the quarterback. Forces fumbles and tips passes at the line.

**Weaknesses:** Coming off a torn Achilles'. Can get engulfed and takes too long to shed blocks. Can be over-aggressive.

**Bottom line:** If he is healthy, Ellis will be in position to make more plays as a pass rusher in Wade Phillips' scheme. **Grade: 7.4**

### Bradie James, LB

**Strengths:** Physical at the point of attack. Uses his hands well. Very smart and gets a jump on the ball. Seldom misses open-field tackles.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks speed. Can be engulfed when he plays too high.

**Bottom line:** James is a tough, downhill player who makes very few mistakes. He lacks ideal athleticism but makes up for it with good fundamental play. **Grade: 7.2**

### ↑ Anthony Henry, CB

**Strengths:** Big, rangy and physical. Strong in press coverage in the red zone. Does a nice job of rerouting receivers. A powerful tackler who makes plays in front of him.

**Weaknesses:** Doesn't have great agility and isn't as fluid as a traditional corner. Has decent instincts and recognition skills but takes too many chances.



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**Bottom line:** Henry is a good player when healthy. He'll excel in the new scheme. **Grade: 7.9**

### Terence Newman, CB

**Strengths:** Can run with most receivers and has the second gear to recover when out of position. Has great leaping ability. Can blanket receivers underneath. A playmaker and good blitz.

**Weaknesses:** Not fundamentally sound. Overaggressive and gets out of position too often. Won't muscle receivers out of routes. An inconsistent open-field tackler. Takes too long to shed blocks. Poor in run support.

**Bottom line:** Newman has the skills to become a top-flight corner but makes too many mistakes in coverage. **Grade: 7.9**

### Roy Williams, S

**Strengths:** Has excellent size. Comfortable lining up close to the line. Reads plays quickly, is aggressive and disrupts running plays in the backfield. Uses hands well. Plays with dis-

cipline; seldom takes false steps. Takes good angles. A reliable open-field tackler and a physical run stuffer. Forces fumbles. Can compete for jump balls; a playmaker.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks elite quickness, recovery speed and agility. Has solid range in zone coverage but will get beat deep when peeking into the backfield.

**Bottom line:** Williams is a big-time tackler and playmaker who can separate the ballcarrier from the ball. He's smart and seldom is out of position. **Grade: 8.9**

### ↑ Ken Hamlin, S

**Strengths:** Has great quickness, good top-end speed and fluid hips for a tall safety. At his best jumping routes in zone coverage. Takes good angles and punishes receivers.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal bulk and can be too aggressive. Better in zone coverage than man-to-man.

**Bottom line:** Hamlin is a playmaker and a quality starter. **Grade: 7.8**

## KEY MOVES

### 2007 DRAFT PICKS

Rd.-Pick

GRADE C-

#### 1-26 Anthony Spencer, OLB, Purdue

Will be used as a nickel pass rusher until he earns a bigger role.

#### 3-67 James Marten, OT, Boston College

Has a big frame (6-8½, 310); could be a good run blocker.

#### 4-103 Isaiah Stanback, WR, Washington

Has big-play ability. Can make people miss in the open field.

#### 4-122 Doug Free, OT, Northern Illinois

Tough; needs to work on his technique as a run blocker.

#### 6-178 Nick Folk, K, Arizona

Has a strong leg but is erratic. Will struggle to beat out Martin Gramatica.

#### 6-195 Deon Anderson, FB, Connecticut

The only true fullback on the roster. Plays with good leverage.

#### 7-212 Courtney Brown, CB, Cal Poly

Has good size (6-1, 200) and speed but will be a bit player at best.

#### 7-237 Alan Ball, CB, Illinois

Needs to get stronger. His best shot to contribute is on special teams.

### VETERAN PLAYERS

**Additions:** RG Leonard Davis (FA/Cardinals), S Ken Hamlin (FA/Seahawks), QB Brad Johnson (FA/Vikings).

**Losses:** QB Drew Bledsoe (retired), LB Ryan Fowler (FA/Titans), C Al Johnson (FA/Cardinals).

make strong safety Roy Williams an impact player again. Williams spent so much time the past three seasons making sure the rest of the secondary was lined up properly that he didn't do his job to the best of his ability. Hamlin now will be the player in charge of getting everyone lined up, which will allow Williams to spend much of his time near the line of scrimmage, where he can be dominant.

Cornerbacks Terence Newman and Anthony Henry are good players who still have the potential to elevate their play and become Pro Bowl-caliber performers. Newman has outstanding speed, quickness and anticipation. The only thing he needs to do is make more interceptions. Henry is a big, physical cornerback whose long arms and excellent technique allow him to consistently knock balls down. He's also solid against the run.

Pat Watkins and Keith Davis will compete for the backup safety jobs, but Watkins gets the edge because of his range and ball skills. Abram Elam could play some as well.

Aaron Glenn is a quality third corner—Newman moves into the slot against three-receiver formations—but he's aging, so the Cowboys will be looking for Jacques Reeves or Nate Jones to start pushing him for playing time. Reeves has improved considerably since his rookie season but still has problems locating the ball on long passes. Jones is a gritty, undersized player. **GRADE: B-**

### SPECIAL TEAMS

Mat McBriar proved he belongs among the top punters in the league. He has improved each season, and there's no reason to think he won't take it up another notch.

Kicker Martin Gramatica will provide the consistency Dallas was trying to get last season when it signed Mike Vanderjagt. Gramatica was 7-of-9 last season and did a quality job on kickoffs.

Newman gives the Cowboys an explosive punt returner but the team wants to use him only in game-breaking situations. Crayton, the other punt returner, is solid but not much of a threat to score.

Dallas has two terrific kick returners in Thompson and Austin. Thompson is faster, but Austin has a better feel and is a more instinctive runner.

Keith Davis continues to be the Cowboys' best player on the kick coverage units, and he could be joined by Burnett this season. **GRADE: B**

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## BOTTOM LINE

This season is all about winning in the playoffs. Phillips knows that; so do the players—and expect them to respond. Behind Tony Romo's outstanding play and

a more aggressive 3-4, the Cowboys will survive a grueling regular season and win their first division title since 1998. Don't be surprised if they make a deep playoff run. **SN**

Jean-Jacques Taylor covers the Cowboys for the Dallas Morning News.



Owens

## PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

### OFFENSE

- QB** ■ Tony Romo  
● Brad Johnson  
**FB** □ Oliver Hoyle  
□ Deon Anderson  
**RB** ■ Julius Jones  
■ Marion Barber  
**WR** ▲ Terrell Owens  
□ Sam Hurd  
**WR** ■ Terry Glenn  
■ Patrick Crayton  
**TE** ▲ Jason Witten  
● Anthony Fasano  
**LT** ■ Flozell Adams  
□ Pat McQuistan  
**LG** ■ Kyle Kosier  
□ Cory Procter  
**C** ■ Andre Gurode  
□ Joe Berger  
**RG** ■ Leonard Davis  
□ Cory Procter  
**RT** ■ Marc Colombo  
● James Marten

### DEFENSE

- LE** ■ Marcus Spears  
□ Junior Glymph  
**NT** ■ Jason Ferguson  
■ Jay Ratliff  
**RE** ■ Chris Canty  
■ Jason Hatcher  
**OLB** ▲ DeMarcus Ware  
● Kevin Burnett  
**ILB** ■ Bradie James  
● Bobby Carpenter  
**ILB** ■ Akin Ayodele  
● Bobby Carpenter  
**OLB** ■ Greg Ellis  
● Anthony Spencer  
**LCB** ■ Terence Newman  
■ Aaron Glenn  
**SS** ▲ Roy Williams  
□ Keith Davis  
**FS** ■ Ken Hamlin  
■ Pat Watkins  
**RCB** ■ Anthony Henry  
● Jacques Reeves

### SPECIALISTS

- K** ● Martin Gramatica  
**P** ▲ Mat McBriar  
▲ Elite ■ Solid ● Adequate □ Fringe

Depth charts updated weekly at [sportingnews.com](http://sportingnews.com)

TOM HAUCK FOR SN

## COWBOYS ROSTER

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL exp.	College	How acq.	2006 GP/GS
QUARTERBACKS							
16	Matt Baker	6-2/212	5/11/83	1	North Carolina	FA/06	0/0
14	Brad Johnson	6-5/226	9/13/68	16	Florida State	FA/07	15/14
9	Tony Romo	6-2/219	4/21/80	5	Eastern Illinois	FA/03	16/10
RUNNING BACKS							
34	Deon Anderson (FB)	5-10/243	1/27/83	R	Connecticut	D6b/07	—
24	Marion Barber	6-0/221	6/10/83	3	Minnesota	D4a/05	16/1
21	Julius Jones	5-10/211	8/14/81	4	Notre Dame	D2/04	16/16
39	Lousaka Polite (FB)	6-0/246	9/14/81	3	Pitt	FA/04	12/0
28	Tyson Thompson	6-1/220	5/21/81	3	San Jose State	FA/05	7/0
RECEIVERS							
84	Patrick Crayton	6-0/205	4/7/79	4	N.W. Oklahoma St.	D7b/04	16/7
80	Anthony Fasano (TE)	6-4/258	4/20/84	2	Notre Dame	D2/06	16/5
83	Terry Glenn	5-11/193	7/23/74	12	Ohio State	T-GB/03	15/14
17	Sam Hurd	6-2/195	4/24/85	2	Northern Illinois	FA/06	15/2
19	Austin Miles	6-3/215	6/30/84	1	Monmouth	FA/06	0/0
81	Terrell Owens	6-3/226	12/7/73	12	Tenn.-Chattanooga	FA/06	16/15
85	Jamaica Rector	5-10/189	8/10/81	2	N.W. Missouri	FA/05	1/0
86	Isaiah Stanback	6-2/213	8/16/84	R	Washington	D4a/07	—
87	Andy Thorn (TE)	6-5/250	2/4/82	2	Northern Iowa	FA/06	1/0
15	Jerheme Urban	6-3/212	11/26/80	3	Trinity (Texas)	FA/06	0/0
82	Jason Witten (TE)	6-5/261	5/6/82	5	Tennessee	D3/03	16/15
OFFENSIVE LINEMEN							
76	Flozell Adams (T)	6-7/343	5/18/75	10	Michigan State	D2/98	16/16
67	Joe Berger (G)	6-5/305	5/25/82	3	Michigan Tech	FA/06	0/0
75	Marc Colombo (T)	6-8/325	10/8/78	6	Boston College	FA/05	16/16
66	Trey Darilek (C)	6-5/310	4/23/81	4	UTEP	FA/07	0/0
70	Leonard Davis (T)	6-6/381	9/5/78	7	Texas	FA/07	16/16
68	Doug Free (T)	6-6/324	1/16/84	R	Northern Illinois	D4b/07	—
65	Andre Gurode (C)	6-4/314	3/6/78	6	Colorado	D2a/02	16/16
63	Kyle Kosier (G)	6-5/309	11/27/78	6	Arizona State	FA/06	16/16
79	James Marten (T)	6-7/309	4/18/84	R	Boston College	D3/07	—
77	Pat McQuistan (T)	6-6/315	4/30/83	2	Weber State	D7a/06	1/0
71	Cory Procter (G)	6-4/305	12/18/82	3	Montana	FA/05	0/0
62	Marco Rivera (G)	6-4/307	4/26/72	12	Penn State	FA/05	16/16
DEFENSIVE LINEMEN							
74	Stephen Bowen (E)	6-5/300	3/28/84	2	Hofstra	FA/06	1/0
99	Chris Canty (E)	6-7/300	11/10/82	3	Virginia	D4b/05	16/16
95	Jason Ferguson (T)	6-3/305	11/28/74	11	Georgia	FA/05	16/16
97	Jason Hatcher (E)	6-6/295	7/13/82	2	Grambling State	D3/06	14/0
91	L.P. Ladouceur (LS/E)	6-4/257	3/13/81	3	California	FA/05	16/0
90	Jeremiah Ratliff (E)	6-4/305	8/29/81	3	Auburn	D7/05	15/0
96	Marcus Spears (E)	6-4/298	3/8/83	3	LSU	D1b/05	16/16
60	Montavious Stanley (T)	6-2/314	9/10/81	2	Louisville	D6/06	3/0
LINEBACKERS							
50	Akin Ayodele	6-2/251	9/17/79	6	Purdue	FA/06	16/16
57	Kevin Burnett	6-3/240	12/24/82	3	Tennessee	D2/05	16/0
54	Bobby Carpenter	6-2/254	8/1/83	2	Ohio State	D1/06	13/1
98	Greg Ellis	6-6/271	8/14/75	10	North Carolina	D1/98	9/9
53	Junior Glymph	6-6/270	9/2/80	4	Carson-Newman	FA/05	2/0
46	Oliver Hoyle	6-2/250	10/5/84	2	N.C. State	FA/06	12/5
56	Bradie James	6-2/245	1/17/81	5	LSU	D4/03	16/16
93	Anthony Spencer	6-3/265	1/23/84	R	Purdue	D1/07	—
94	DeMarcus Ware	6-4/257	7/31/82	3	Troy State	D1a/05	16/16
DEFENSIVE BACKS							
38	Alan Ball (CB)	6-1/182	3/29/85	R	Illinois	D7b/07	—
20	Damarius Bilbo (S)	6-2/220	12/3/82	1	Georgia Tech	FA/06	0/0
40	Courtney Brown (CB)	6-1/200	2/10/84	R	Cal-Poly	D7a/07	—
36	Quincy Butler (CB)	6-1/190	11/25/81	2	TCU	FA/06	1/0
29	Keith Davis (S)	5-11/205	12/30/78	5	Sam Houston State	FA/02	15/6
37	Abram Elam (S)	6-0/210	10/15/81	2	Kent State	FA/06	15/0
26	Aaron Glenn (CB)	5-9/185	7/16/72	14	Texas A&M	FA/05	16/1
27	Ken Hamlin (S)	6-2/209	1/20/81	5	Arkansas	FA/07	16/16
42	Anthony Henry (CB)	6-1/205	11/3/76	7	South Florida	FA/05	16/16
33	Nathan Jones (DB)	5-10/192	6/13/82	4	Rutgers	D7a/04	4/0
41	Terence Newman (CB)	5-11/195	9/4/78	5	Kansas State	D1/03	16/16
35	Jacques Reeves (CB)	5-11/190	10/8/82	4	Purdue	D7b/04	13/0
23	Joey Thomas (CB)	6-1/190	8/29/80	3	Montana State	FA/07	0/0
25	Pat Watkins (S)	6-5/212	12/18/82	2	Florida State	D5/06	14/9
31	Roy Williams (S)	6-0/226	8/14/80	6	Oklahoma	D1/02	16/16
SPECIALISTS							
6	Nick Folk (K)	6-1/225	11/5/84	R	Arizona	D6a/07	—
7	Martin Gramatica (K)	5-8/170	11/27/75	8	Kansas State	FA/06	8/0
1	Mat McBriar (P)	6-1/223	7/8/79	4	Hawaii	FA/04	16/0

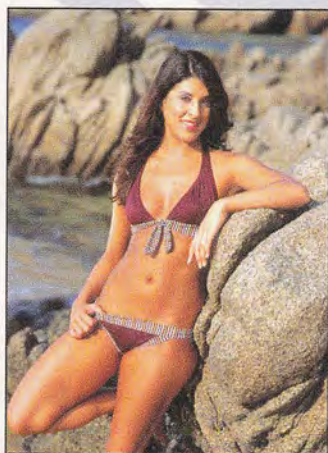
Abbreviations: D1-draft pick, first round; W-claimed on waivers; T-obtained in trade; FA-free-agent acquisition.

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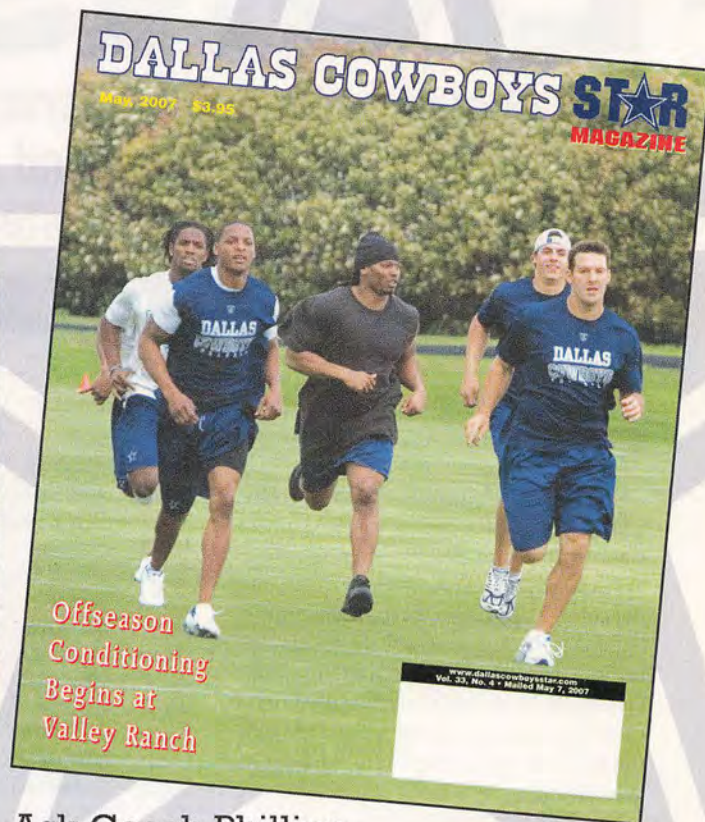
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# LIONS

**They should make a move forward. How big of a move will depend on whether everyone is in lock step.**

**SN PICK** 4th, NFC North (5-11)

By **TOM KOWALSKI**

**T**o understand why the Lions struggled through a 3-13 year in Rod Marinelli's first season as head coach, you've got to realize where Marinelli was starting from. Yes, the Lions had been sad sacks in the previous five years and a losing culture had seeped deep to their roots, but that wasn't the worst of it. In the months before Marinelli took the job, the Lions players—get this—would actually argue among themselves because they weren't happy with the order in which they were introduced before games.

So, while Marinelli immediately changed the offensive and defensive schemes, he realized that changing the atmosphere in the locker room was going to be a much tougher—and much longer—ordeal.

In a little more than a year, Marinelli has made sweeping changes throughout the roster. He doesn't want a collection of talented individuals; he wants a team of passionate, football-hungry fanatics. The culture is definitely improving, but even Marinelli isn't sure he has done enough. The Lions will improve this season, but how big a step they can take will depend on whether they're all stepping in the same direction.

## OFFENSE

Mike Martz is entering his second season as coordinator and believes he now can fine-tune his system as opposed to the learning process he guided his players through last year.

Martz puts a lot of responsibility on the quarterbacks and receivers because the passing game is based on timing, so the throws have to be accurate and the routes have to be precise. The team was making so many mistakes last year, Martz had to cut back on the playbook—something that irked him and something he doesn't plan to do this season.

**Quarterbacks**—Jon Kitna is so excited about his second season in Martz's system that he brazenly predicted the Lions will win 10 games. That's not just wishful thinking. Kitna has seen on tape all of the big plays he and the receivers left on the field last season. Kitna doesn't have to improve a great deal in the

## SCHEDULE

All times Eastern

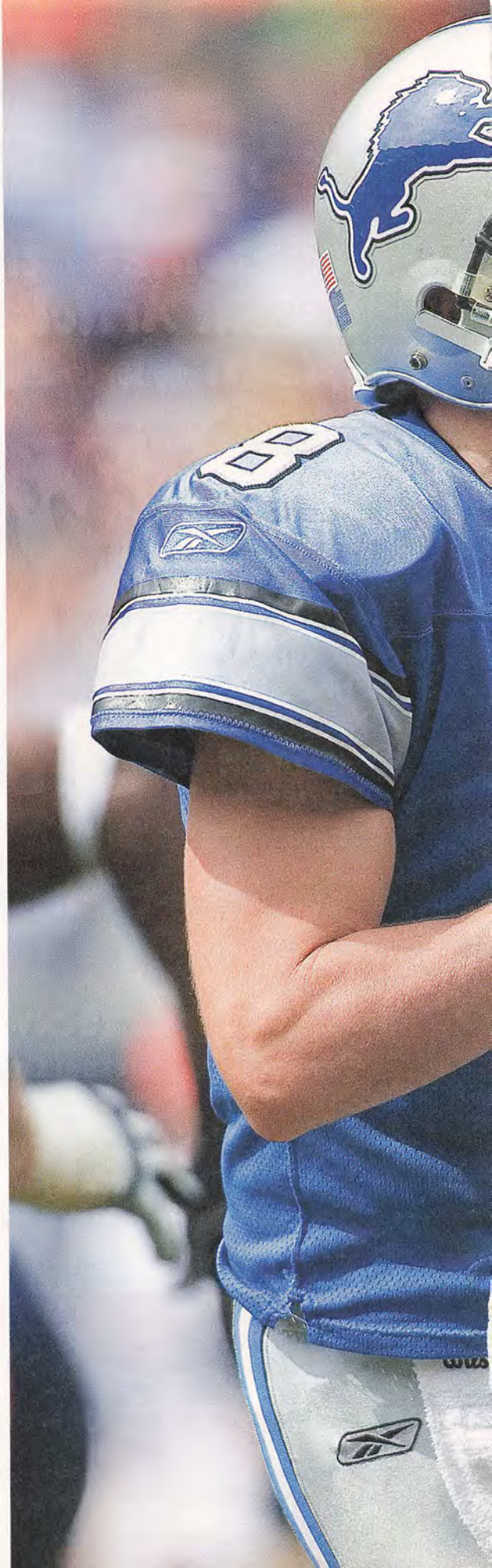
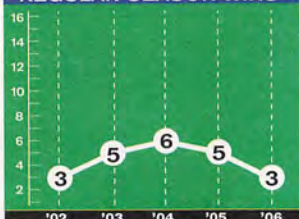
Sept. 9	at Oakland	4:15
Sept. 16	MINNESOTA	4:05
Sept. 23	at Philadelphia	1:00
Sept. 30	CHICAGO	1:00
Oct. 7	at Washington	1:00
Oct. 14	Open date	
Oct. 21	TAMPA BAY	1:00
Oct. 28	at Chicago	1:00
Nov. 4	DENVER	1:00
Nov. 11	at Arizona	4:15
Nov. 18	N.Y. GIANTS	4:15
Nov. 22	GREEN BAY†	12:30
Dec. 2	at Minnesota	1:00
Dec. 9	DALLAS	1:00
Dec. 16	at San Diego	4:15
Dec. 23	KANSAS CITY	1:00
Dec. 30	at Green Bay	1:00

Strength of schedule: T-14th

†Thursday

Analysis of every Lions game:  
sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom

## REGULAR-SEASON WINS





Kitna

JAY DROWNS / SN

scheme because he knows it so well and most of the problems weren't his; it was because the backs and receivers weren't always in the right spots. While Martz says that at least seven of Kitna's 22 interceptions weren't his fault, Kitna has to do a better job of not getting frustrated and trying to do too much.

Dan Orlovsky now is the backup, replacing Josh McCown, who was traded to Oakland. Depth is an issue—if something happens to Kitna, the Lions will be treading into unknown waters because McCown had more career starts (22) than Orlovsky has pass attempts (17). Orlovsky has a strong arm and decent accuracy, but he struggled with the complex offense in the preseason last year. Second-round pick Drew Stanton isn't expected to push Orlovsky for the No. 2 spot because it's going to take him time to absorb the offense. **GRADE: C**

**Running backs**—If Kevin Jones successfully returns from a foot injury—he's scheduled to be ready in training camp—he'll take the majority of snaps because of his versatility and knowledge of the offense. Jones showed last season he can be effective catching the ball, but he also has to do a better job of minimizing his mistakes in the complex system, whether it's the precision of his routes or blitz pickups. Even if Jones is ready, don't expect Tatum Bell to spend a lot of time on the bench. An off-season addition, Bell is another good receiver out of the backfield with excellent speed. Martz will find ways to get both backs on the field and put greater pressure on the defense.

Fullback Shawn Bryson's value is in his versatility. He can be a lead blocker, pick up blitzes and catch passes. The Lions have been horrible in short-yardage and goal-line situations in recent years, and that's why they picked up free agent T.J. Duckett. While Duckett can help the team in other ways, his major role will be picking up the hard yards between the tackles. **GRADE: B-**

**Receivers**—Roy Williams and No. 1 draft pick Calvin Johnson will give the Lions an excellent 1-2 punch and provide

## SCOUT TAKES

### A scout from another team sizes up the Lions

I like **Cory Redding** more at end than at tackle. But what you've got is a tremendous football player either way. He's got size and strength, he's explosive and he's a leader. ... **Travis Fisher** wasn't a great acquisition because he still doesn't give them the physical presence they're looking for. He's not a physical corner. But he gives them depth when they have to cover three or four wideouts. ... **Calvin Johnson** will help them immensely. He gives them another viable threat at wide receiver, and he'll create matchup problems for defenses with smaller corners. If you have to play them twice, that's something to think about. ... They have a lot of young talent that is improving. Overall, their passing game is solid. They've got some fast linebackers who fly around to the ball, and their line can create pressure on the quarterback. So there's a lot of reasons for fans to be optimistic.



JOHN DUNN FOR SN

Kitna with a couple of huge targets with excellent speed. Johnson will be the focal point of the passing game, and his blend of size and quickness will turn him into a dominant player as soon as he understands Martz's route running system.

Williams has deceptive speed, so he should score more long touchdowns, but he won't reach the elite class of receivers until he becomes more consistent and reduces his mental errors. Williams went through a drastic learning curve last season because of all the plays and responsibility that was dumped on him. He has a lot of pride, and his focus should be sharper this season.

Mike Furrey, the No. 3 receiver, can step in and play the outside for either Johnson or Williams and not lose much production. Furrey doesn't have the speed of the bigger receivers, but he has great knowledge of the offense and is good at getting open. Free-agent addition Shaun McDonald will be the No. 4 guy, partly because he has good speed but also because he has been in Martz's system before and knows what he's doing.

Although tight end Dan Campbell doesn't catch a lot of passes, he usually comes up with some big plays downfield. He's an excellent blocker, so the Lions like to keep him on the field. Backup Casey FitzSimmons is a good receiver but doesn't have consistency in the blocking game. **GRADE: B**

**Line**—This unit will have three new starters, even if right guard Damien Woody returns. That's because Woody, who was fined often last year for being overweight, will have to be a thinner and more agile player. If Woody doesn't come back in better condition, the Lions will put a different player in there.

Left guard Edwin Mulitalo and right tackle George Foster were acquired in the offseason with the idea of adding some muscle to a relatively weak running game. Mulitalo has massive size and is a mauler in the trenches. Foster can be an explosive run blocker and he moves well laterally.

Left tackle Jeff Backus must bounce back from a disappointing season during which he committed too many mental mistakes. Center Dominic Raiola is good at getting to the second level and blocks well in space, but he doesn't dominate inside.

Based on his solid performance last year, Stephen Peterman

## SCOUTING REPORTS: OFFENSE

### ↓ Jon Kitna, QB

**Strengths:** A tough leader who is smart and always prepared. Has above-average strength. A good mentor who may have a future as a coach.

**Weaknesses:** Average or below in almost every category: release, foot quickness, accuracy, touch and speed. **Bottom line:** Kitna put up career-high numbers in nearly every passing category in 2006, including interceptions and sacks. He's on the downside of his career and no longer is a starting-caliber quarterback. **Grade: 6.4**

### Kevin Jones, RB

**Strengths:** Has an outstanding combination of size and quickness. Breaks a lot of arm tackles. Runs with balance, explodes through the hole and has good cutback ability. Has decent hands and is a willing blocker.

**Weaknesses:** Has some durability and ball-security issues. Will run too high and take some shots. Inconsistent on blitz pickups and lacks savvy and consistency as a route runner.

**Bottom line:** Jones is a talented player but his ability to reach elite status will be limited by durability issues and the team's offensive scheme. **Grade: 6.8**

### Tatum Bell, RB

**Strengths:** Has explosive burst and straight-line speed. Hits the hole hard and accelerates quickly. Has quick feet and can make defenders miss. A functional receiver who is dangerous after the catch.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks patience and vision. Pass protection needs improvement. Always looking to get to the outside and will shy away from contact inside.

**Bottom line:** Bell has home run speed, but he's also a tease. Whenever he seems like he is about to break out, he gets hurt or makes a big mistake. It will be interesting to see how long he can co-exist in Detroit with coordinator Mike Martz. **Grade: 6.6**

### ↑ Roy Williams, WR

**Strengths:** Has a good combination of size, strength and speed. Can stretch the field and usually has a great burst after the catch. Has big, soft hands and can catch anything thrown to him. Has excellent leaping ability. Difficult to jam.

**Weaknesses:** Must improve his durability, stamina and focus. Not the

sharpest intermediate route runner.

**Bottom line:** Williams needs to be more consistent catching the ball and to work on his route running to become a more complete receiver and reach elite status at his position. **Grade: 7.9**

### ↑ Mike Furrey, WR

**Strengths:** Has good hands and tracks the ball well. Good in the slot. Understands how to run routes.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks good speed and strength. A marginal blocker.

**Bottom line:** Furrey isn't the most physically gifted player, but he's a hard worker with a great motor and he makes few mistakes on the field. **Grade: 7.0**

### \*Calvin Johnson, WR

**Strengths:** Has great hands. Makes spectacular catches frequently and tough catches in traffic. Runs sharp, precise routes. Can absorb hard hits without going down. Gets moving quickly off the snap and accelerates to full speed against off coverage.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks elite explosiveness and speed. Struggles to separate consistently from tight man-to-man coverage. Should run more aggressively. Must work harder on his blocking.

**Bottom line:** Johnson has the size, strength and hands to dominate. He should make an instant impact.

### Dan Campbell, TE

**Strengths:** Works hard to sustain blocks. Has good upper-body strength and plays with good leverage. Has adequate lateral mobility and can adjust to moving targets in space. Runs sharp short-to-intermediate routes and seldom drops passes.

**Weaknesses:** Not a playmaker. Has problems creating separation vs. man coverage. Lacks elusiveness.

**Bottom line:** Campbell gets paid to do the dirty work, and he is an outstanding blocker with a passion for the game. **Grade: 7.0**

## FANTASY SOURCE PICKS

### STUD

WR Roy Williams

### STUMBLER

WR Mike Furrey

### RISK/REWARD

RB Tatum Bell

### INJURY RISK

RB Kevin Jones

### TOP NEWCOMER

WR Calvin Johnson

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Players are graded by War Room scouts on a 1-10 scale.  
\*Rookies (not graded)

## INSIDERS POLL

In Year 2 with Mike Martz as coordinator, the Lions' offense will:



Based on a poll of SN's 32 team correspondents

## BOLD PREDICTIONS

- 1 In his fourth season, WR Roy Williams finally will get it. Williams will show the focus and consistency that's required to be a true playmaker—and a Pro Bowl player.
- 2 DT Shaun Rogers will become disenchanted with the sacks and attention garnered by Cory Redding, who played so well last year that he displaced Rogers at the under tackle position.
- 3 QB Jon Kitna will have 10 more TD passes than interceptions. Not only will Kitna be better, the receiving corps will be more cohesive and the line much improved.

could challenge Woody for a starting spot. Peterman has excellent awareness and strength, and he can recover if he gets beat. Rex Tucker is a solid tackle who is strong and can get off the edge. If he stays healthy, look for the Lions to also use him as an extra tight end for the power running game. Tackle Jonathan Scott moves well but has raw mechanics, especially in handling the outside speed rush. Frank Davis is an outstanding athlete who will compete for a backup spot at center, but he must eliminate mental mistakes. **GRADE: D**

### DEFENSE

The team will be in the second season of the one-gap scheme, but it'll be slightly different because of new coordinator Joe Barry.

Former coordinator Donnie Henderson wasn't a Tampa 2 proponent and wanted to be much more aggressive, particularly

### George Foster, T

**Strengths:** Has excellent size and strength. Can be an explosive run blocker when he bends his knees. Has good athletic ability and is light on his feet. Gets good depth when he sets up to pass block.

**Weaknesses:** Must improve his mechanics to optimize his strength. Has a narrow base when run blocking. Exposes his chest and sets up too wide in pass protection.

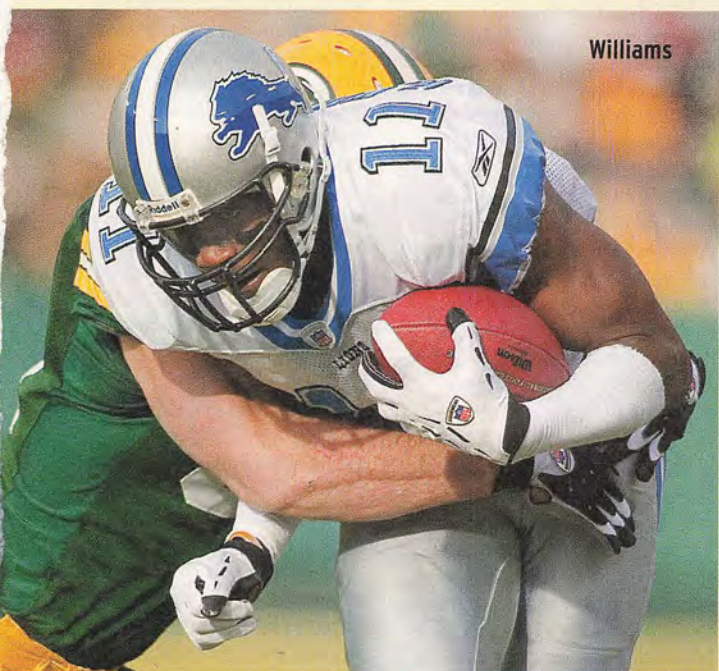
**Bottom line:** Foster still is on the rise and continues to grow as a player.

**Grade: 7.7**

itive player with deceptive athletic ability. Plays with a mean streak and knows how to finish blocks. Has excellent upper- and lower-body strength.

**Weaknesses:** Overextends at times and slips off a defender after making initial contact. Occasionally struggles in pass protection when defensive linemen have wide splits. Doesn't have great change-of-direction skills.

**Bottom line:** Mulitalo is a blue-collar run blocker who also has the athleticism to excel in pass protection. He should help a unit that was overwhelmed last season. **Grade: 6.9**



Williams

JAY DROWNS / SN

### Jeff Backus, T

**Strengths:** Uses a strong punch to shock the rusher off the snap. Can anchor and get leverage vs. power rushers. If he can get his hands on the inside of the defenders off the snap, he'll win the battle.

**Weaknesses:** Foot quickness is below average. Can't sustain blocks against speed rushers. Struggles to change direction and is not quick to recover against counter moves.

**Bottom line:** Backus is a solid left tackle, but he must improve his focus and become more aggressive to move into the upper class at the position.

**Grade: 7.0**

### ↑ Dominic Raiola, C

**Strengths:** Quick, powerful and nasty for his size. Gets position and sustains blocks. Can reach the second level and adjust to moving targets. Plays with balance and a nice base in pass protection. Can hold his ground vs. bull rushers.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal size and strength. Will fight, but isn't a true mauler. Gets overpowered by big two-gap defenders. Needs to improve his initial quickness and recognition skills.

**Bottom line:** Raiola, a decent starter, will become one of the league's better centers if he improves his technique. **Grade: 6.7**

**KEY:** ↑ Ascending ↓ Descending

### Edwin Mulitalo, G

**Strengths:** A tough, physical, compet-

with the blitzing game, so his system had a few different wrinkles. Barry, the former linebackers coach in Tampa, will adhere to the principles of the scheme.

**Line**—The Lions should dominate inside because tackles Shaun Rogers and Cory Redding are explosively quick and strong enough to disrupt both the run and pass. Rogers takes away the running game inside and has to be double-teamed as a pass rusher. Redding uses his hands well as a pass rusher and also can play end.

There are more questions on the outside, where free-agent addition Dewayne White becomes the starter at left end, and right end Kalimba Edwards still hasn't reached his potential. White was part of the rotation in Tampa, but he'll get a lot more playing time with the Lions, who expect him to get consistent pass-rushing pressure. He makes up for his lack of size with good speed, compact pass-rush moves and a relentless motor. Edwards has the agility to be productive but is tall and lean and sometimes gets lost in the running game.

The Lions have decent depth in Shaun Cody, Jared DeVries and Corey Smith. Cody has good quickness and is strong inside, but his production hasn't matched his skills. DeVries is a good athlete who uses his experience and technique to overcome physical limitations. Smith is undersized but has excellent quickness off the edge and plays with great determination.

#### GRADE: C

**Linebackers**—Second-year player Ernie Sims will start on the weak side. Sims has great speed and quickness, and he hits like a player who is 30 pounds heavier. He's smart and active but sometimes is overaggressive and loses discipline within the scheme.

Strongside man Boss Bailey, who continues to improve against the run, is getting a better feel for zone coverages, but he still makes mistakes and isn't a big hitter for his size. Teddy Lehman doesn't miss a lot of tackles and has the speed to play the deep middle in pass coverage, but he must be more of a playmaker. He also has to show he has fully recovered from a lingering foot injury.

Bailey could share time with Alex Lewis, who does an excellent job in pass coverage and hits with power in the running game but sometimes gets lost in traffic. Paris Lenon and Donte Curry are the other backups. Lenon doesn't have great speed

## SECRET WEAPON



ROBERT SEALE / SN ARCHIVES

### DEWAYNE WHITE, DE

White must set the tone for the defense, not just with his intensity and focus, but also his relentless pass-rushing ability. The Tampa 2 scheme relies a lot on pass pressure up front. Without it, the system breaks down, leaving linebackers and defensive backs vulnerable. If White can't deliver, there will be little hope of success.

## SCOUTING REPORTS: DEFENSE

### ↑ Dewayne White, E

**Strengths:** Has natural pass-rushing ability and displays explosiveness off the snap. Tackles well in the open field and has solid pursuit ability.

**Weaknesses:** Struggles against the run; doesn't play with leverage. Gets knocked back on runs, especially in goal-line and short-yardage situations.

**Bottom line:** White should be a good fit in Detroit. Coach Rod Marinelli knows him from his days in Tampa and will put him in position to make plays with his speed and athleticism.

**Grade: 6.5**

### Kalimba Edwards, E

**Strengths:** Has good speed and quickness. Uses his long arms to get in the passing lanes of the quarterback. Athletic enough to drop into coverage.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks strength, toughness and flexibility. Needs to develop a finishing move to get the sack. Gets caught out of position a lot.

**Bottom line:** Edwards has yet to live up to his hype. He relies too much on his flat-out speed and quickness, and must develop his pass-rush moves. He's not an every-down player but is at his best as a situational pass rusher.

**Grade: 5.9**

### ↓ Shaun Rogers, T

**Strengths:** Has an exceptional combination of quickness, size and power. Has phenomenal power at the point of attack. Stands up interior linemen, uses swim moves and penetrates consistently. Has a great closing burst, takes good angles and changes directions ridiculously well for his size. A playmaker on the run and a powerful tackler. Plays one-gap and two-gap techniques equally effectively.

**Weaknesses:** Can wear down, though his endurance is much more consistent than in the past. Sometimes plays high and loses explosiveness. Can be overaggressive and take himself out of plays.

**Bottom line:** Rogers is a beast and must constantly be accounted for by offensive coordinators. He has had durability issues recently, but he can be a dominating player.

**Grade: 7.5**

### Cory Redding, T

**Strengths:** A strong run defender who makes plays with effort. Outstanding with leverage off the snap. Has great power and strength. Can hold the

point against double-teams, split the blocks and make the play. Uses hands well as a pass rusher.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks speed and quickness. Doesn't move well laterally.

**Bottom line:** Redding, who is versatile enough to play anywhere on the line, emerged as a pass-rushing threat last season. The Lions thought enough of him to give him their franchise tag.

**Grade: 7.4**

### ↑ Ernie Sims, LB

**Strengths:** Fast and athletic. Makes plays from sideline to sideline. Takes good angles and does a good job of getting through traffic to the ball. Can shed blocks quickly and explode into ballcarriers. Drops into coverage smoothly and can cover tight ends and running backs man-to-man.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal size. Must strengthen lower body and do a better job at the point. Can get caught out of position when trying to avoid blockers.

**Bottom line:** Sims fits the profile of the Tampa 2 weakside linebacker and brings the speed, athleticism and playmaking flair many seek.

**Grade: 7.9**

### Boss Bailey, LB

**Strengths:** Has an nice blend of size and speed. Slips blocks, pursues hard and makes plays from behind. Shows great closing burst. Has excellent range in zone coverage and can match up man-to-man with most backs and tight ends.

**Weaknesses:** Has played only 11 games over the last two years, so he's still raw. Lacks lower-body strength, toughness and instincts against the run. Struggles to shed blocks and gets out of position while trying to avoid them.

**Bottom line:** Bailey has the physical skills to be a Pro Bowl-type player, but he must get stronger, become more instinctive and stay healthy for a full season.

**Grade: 7.5**

### Teddy Lehman, LB

**Strengths:** Has an excellent combination of size and speed. Fills gaps hard and delivers good initial pop. Plays under control in space and has good range. Shows great burst to the ball moving forward in coverage.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal agility, power and polish. Must improve his leverage and get stronger to take on blocks.



Sims

JAY DROWNS / SN

**Bottom line:** As the middle linebacker in a Tampa 2 scheme, Lehman is in an ideal situation. But he must improve his technique and angles. **Grade: 6.9**

### Travis Fisher, CB

**Strengths:** Shows good footwork and closing speed. Changes direction quickly and has good short-area, man-to-man skills. Willing to help in run support.

**Weaknesses:** Undersized and fundamentally flawed. Has trouble against bigger receivers and won't compete for jump balls. Vulnerable to play-action and double moves. Lacks recovery speed.

**Bottom line:** Despite his lack of size and discipline in coverage, Fisher has the physical skills to be an adequate cover 2 corner. **Grade: 6.8**

### Stanley Wilson, CB

**Strengths:** A good athlete with prototypical size, speed, athletic ability and hands.

**Weaknesses:** Poor recognition skills often lead to poor breaks and bad angles. Playmaking ability is limited. Will struggle in coverage.

**Bottom line:** Wilson has good physical

skills and looks the part, but he needs more experience. **Grade: 6.5**

### Kenoy Kennedy, S

**Strengths:** Can run over blockers on the blitz and punish receivers over the middle. Excels near the line, is aggressive against the run and can shed blocks quickly.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal burst and fluidity. Gets overmatched against slot receivers and most tight ends in man-to-man. Lacks ball skills. Vulnerable to play-action and fakes.

**Bottom line:** Kennedy is a one-dimensional player who is excellent in run support, but he can be a liability on passing downs. **Grade: 7.7**

### ↑ Daniel Bullocks, S

**Strengths:** Has good speed and excellent instincts. Willing to give run support and is a good tackler. Has good range and enough speed to help the corner on sideline routes.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal quickness and change-of-direction skills. Can be overaggressive in coverage.

**Bottom line:** Bullocks is a better run support safety than he is in coverage, but he could be a leader on the Lions defense. **Grade: 7.1**

## KEY MOVES

### 2007 DRAFT PICKS

Rd.-Pick

GRADE C-

#### 1-2 Calvin Johnson, WR, Georgia Tech

His desire and smarts will help him pick up a complex system.

#### 2-43 Drew Stanton, QB, Michigan State

Mike Martz believes he can smooth out Stanton's mechanics.

#### 2-58 Ikaika Alama-Francis, DE, Hawaii

Very good against the run, but his pass-rush moves need polish.

#### 2-61 Gerald Alexander, S, Boise State

Versatile defensive back will be thrown into the mix at safety.

#### 4-105 A.J. Davis, CB, N.C. State

Aggressive in bump-and-run press coverage. Has good quickness.

#### 4-117 Manuel Ramirez, G, Texas Tech

Has a great motor and nasty streak but must show more agility.

#### 5-158 Johnny Baldwin, OLB, Alabama A&M

Aggressive player fits the one-gap scheme.

#### 7-255 Ramzee Robinson, CB, Alabama

Works well in zone coverage but is a long shot to make the team.

## VETERAN PLAYERS

**Additions:** RB Tatum Bell (trade/Broncos), RB T.J. Duckett (FA/Redskins), CB Travis Fisher (FA/Rams), T George Foster (trade/Broncos), WR Shaun McDonald (FA/Rams), G Edwin Mulitalo (FA/Ravens), DE Dewayne White (FA/Bucs).

**Losses:** DT Marcus Bell (FA), CB Dre' Bly (trade/Broncos), G Rick DeMulling (FA/Colts), CB Jamar Fletcher (FA/Texans), DE James Hall (trade/Rams), S Terrence Holt (FA/Cardinals), DT Tyoka Jackson (FA), QB Josh McCown (trade/Raiders), S Jon McGraw (FA/Chiefs), TE Marcus Pollard (FA/Seahawks), FB Cory Schlesinger (FA/Dolphins), G Ross Verba (FA), WR Mike Williams (trade/Raiders).

but quickly recognizes what's unfolding in front of him. Curry is versatile enough to play any of the linebacker positions, but his strength is special teams. **GRADE: D**

**Secondary**—Travis Fisher, a free-agent addition, will start at one cornerback spot. If he can stay healthy, he's an ideal fit for the Tampa 2 scheme because he's excellent in short zones and is a tenacious hitter in run support.

Stanley Wilson, the other projected starting corner, found his confidence late last season. He has good speed and is versatile enough to fill any role.

Kenoy Kennedy, Daniel Bullocks and rookie Gerald Alexander will compete for the two starting safety spots. Kennedy isn't quite the imposing presence for receivers coming across the middle he once was because he has been fined so often for his hits. He is solid in certain assignments but doesn't have the skills or instincts for deep coverage.

Bullocks will have the edge over Alexander, but he has to do a better job of delivering big hits in run support and reacting to long routes when he covers the deep middle. Alexander is a former cornerback who can play outside if needed, but his strength is supporting the run.

Despite his lack of size, backup corner Fernando Bryant shows good instincts and toughness as a run supporter. Dee McCann is fast with excellent skills and instincts, but he gets caught out of position too often. Safety Idrees Bashir is at his best when he plays closer to the line. **GRADE: D**

## SPECIAL TEAMS

Coach Stan Kwan, who replaces the retired Chuck Priefer, has an excellent cast with which to work. Kicker Jason Hanson, 37, isn't showing any signs of aging and still can boom 50-yard field goals and be effective on kickoffs. Punter Nick Harris has been good at pinning teams deep, whether it's with long, high kicks or short pooch punts. Eddie Drummond has handled both punt and kick return duties, but he hasn't shown the flash

or explosiveness of recent years.

If the Lions feel Drummond won't also be an asset at receiver, they could cut him and divide the return duties between such players as Shaun McDonald (punts) and Devalle Ellis (kickoffs).

Don Muhlbach has devel-

oped into a reliable long snapper and recently was signed to a long-term deal. **GRADE: A-**

## BOTTOM LINE

The talent is there for the Lions to do something they haven't done in six years: play a meaningful game in December. If they stay healthy and stay together, an 8-8 record isn't out of the question.

Personnel upgrades will make them more effective in the red zone and they're going to score points. But their ultimate success—or failure—will rest with a defense that has yet to show enough playmaking ability in the fourth quarter. **SN**

Tom Kowalski covers the Lions for Booth Newspapers.

## PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE	DEFENSE
<b>QB</b> ■ Jon Kitna	<b>LE</b> ■ Dewayne White
□ Dan Orlovsky	● Jared DeVries
<b>FB</b> ● Shawn Bryson	<b>UT</b> ▲ Cory Redding
● T.J. Duckett	● Shaun Cody
<b>RB</b> ▲ Kevin Jones	<b>NT</b> ▲ Shaun Rogers
■ Tatum Bell	● Shaun Cody
<b>WR</b> ▲ Calvin Johnson	<b>RE</b> ● Kalimba Edwards
■ Mike Furrey	● Corey Smith
<b>WR</b> ▲ Roy Williams	<b>SLB</b> ● Boss Bailey
● Shaun McDonald	● Alex Lewis
<b>TE</b> ■ Dan Campbell	<b>MLB</b> ● Teddy Lehman
● Casey FitzSimmons	● Paris Lenon
<b>LT</b> ■ Jeff Backus	<b>WLB</b> ■ Ernie Sims
□ Jonathan Scott	□ Donte Curry
<b>LG</b> ■ Edwin Mulitalo	<b>LCB</b> ● Travis Fisher
□ Stephen Peterman	● Fernando Bryant
<b>C</b> ■ Dominic Raiola	<b>SS</b> ● Kenoy Kennedy
□ Frank Davis	□ Idrees Bashir
<b>RG</b> ■ Damien Woody	<b>FS</b> ● Daniel Bullocks
■ Barry Stokes	□ Gerald Alexander
<b>RT</b> ● George Foster	<b>RCB</b> ● Stanley Wilson
● Rex Tucker	□ Dee McCann

## SPECIALISTS

<b>K</b> ▲ Jason Hanson	<b>KR</b> ● Eddie Drummond
<b>P</b> ■ Nick Harris	<b>PR</b> ● Eddie Drummond
	<b>LS</b> ■ Don Muhlbach

▲ Elite ■ Solid ● Adequate □ Fringe

Depth charts updated weekly at [sportingnews.com](http://sportingnews.com)

## LIONS ROSTER

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL exp.	College	How acq.	2006 GP/GS
QUARTERBACKS							
8	Jon Kitna	6-2/220	9/21/72	11	Central Washington	FA/06	16/16
6	Dan Orlovsky	6-5/230	8/18/83	3	Connecticut	D5/05	0/0
5	Drew Stanton	6-3/230	5/7/84	R	Michigan State	D2a/07	—
RUNNING BACKS							
28	Tatum Bell	5-11/213	3/2/81	4	Oklahoma State	T-Den/07	13/13
24	Shawn Bryson (FB)	6-1/230	11/20/76	9	Tennessee	FA/03	6/1
29	Brian Calhoun	5-10/208	5/8/84	2	Wisconsin	D3/06	7/0
36	Aveion Cason	5-10/204	7/12/79	5	Illinois State	FA/06	6/2
45	T.J. Duckett (FB)	6-0/254	2/17/81	6	Michigan State	FA/07	10/0
34	Kevin Jones	6-0/228	8/21/82	4	Virginia Tech	D1b/04	12/12
43	Will Matthews (FB)	6-3/250	4/30/81	2	Texas	FA/05	0/0
RECEIVERS							
89	Dan Campbell (TE)	6-5/262	4/13/76	9	Texas A&M	FA/06	16/11
18	Eddie Drummond	5-9/190	4/12/80	6	Penn State	FA/02	14/0
80	Devalle Ellis	5-10/174	4/2/84	2	Hofstra	FA/06	9/2
82	Casey FitzSimmons (TE)	6-4/258	10/10/80	5	Carroll (Mont.)	FA/03	11/2
87	Mike Furrey	6-0/195	5/12/77	5	Northern Iowa	FA/06	16/14
81	Calvin Johnson	6-5/235	9/25/85	R	Georgia Tech	D1/07	—
85	Kevin Kasper	6-1/205	12/23/77	5	Iowa	FA/06	1/1
84	Shaun McDonald	5-10/183	6/13/81	5	Arizona State	FA/07	16/0
49	Sean McHugh (TE)	6-5/262	5/27/82	4	Penn State	W-GB/05	6/2
86	Marcus Robinson	6-3/215	2/27/75	11	South Carolina	FA/07	10/3
19	Cliff Russell	5-11/193	2/8/79	5	Utah	FA/07	3/0
28	Darnell Sanders (TE)	6-6/270	3/16/79	4	Ohio State	FA/07	0/0
15	Edell Shepherd	6-1/175	5/18/80	5	San Jose State	FA/07	7/0
11	Roy Williams	6-3/212	12/20/81	4	Texas	D1/04	16/16
OFFENSIVE LINEMEN							
76	Jeff Backus (T)	6-5/305	9/21/77	7	Michigan	D1/01	16/16
61	Frank Davis (C)	6-3/325	8/22/81	2	South Florida	FA/06	11/3
72	George Foster (T)	6-5/338	6/9/80	5	Georgia	T-Den/07	16/13
48	Don Muhlbach (LS)	6-4/265	8/17/81	4	Texas A&M	FA/04	16/0
64	Edwin Mulitalo (G)	6-3/345	9/1/74	9	Arizona	FA/07	4/4
63	Ben Noll (G)	6-4/315	11/14/81	3	Pennsylvania	FA/06	0/0
60	Dave Pearson (C)	6-3/287	3/29/81	3	Michigan	FA/04	2/0
66	Stephen Peterman (G)	6-4/323	1/11/82	3	LSU	FA/06	3/2
51	Dominic Raiola (C)	6-1/295	12/30/78	7	Nebraska	D2a/01	16/16
71	Manuel Ramirez (G)	6-3/335	2/19/83	R	Texas Tech	D4b/07	—
67	Blaine Saipaia (G)	6-3/310	8/25/78	4	Colorado State	W-SU/06	6/4
73	Jonathan Scott (T)	6-6/310	1/10/83	2	Texas	D5/06	13/4
77	Clint Stickdon (T)	6-5/307	4/30/82	2	Cincinnati	FA/05	1/0
68	Barry Stokes (G)	6-4/310	12/20/73	10	Eastern Michigan	FA/06	11/11
74	Rex Tucker (T/G)	6-5/315	12/20/76	9	Texas A&M	FA/06	6/5
65	Damien Woody (G/C)	6-3/340	11/3/77	9	Boston College	FA/04	5/5
DEFENSIVE LINEMEN							
94	Ikaika Alama-Francis (E)	6-5/250	12/4/84	R	Hawaii	D2b/07	—
75	Shaun Cody (T)	6-4/310	1/22/83	3	USC	D2/05	6/5
95	Jared DeVries (E)	6-4/275	6/11/76	9	Iowa	D3/99	14/9
98	Kalimba Edwards (E)	6-6/265	12/26/79	6	South Carolina	D2/02	16/10
79	Langston Moore (T)	6-1/305	7/17/81	3	South Carolina	FA/06	3/0
62	Cleveland Pinkney (T)	6-1/300	9/14/77	3	South Carolina	FA/06	8/0
78	Cory Redding (T)	6-4/290	11/15/80	5	Texas	D3/03	16/16
92	Shaun Rogers (T)	6-4/345	3/12/79	7	Texas	D2b/01	6/6
93	Corey Smith (E)	6-2/250	10/2/79	5	N.C. State	FA/06	8/1
90	Bill Swancutt (E)	6-4/270	9/4/82	3	Oregon State	D6a/05	0/0
91	Dewayne White (E)	6-2/273	10/19/79	5	Louisville	FA/07	16/8
LINEBACKERS							
97	Boss Bailey	6-3/233	10/14/79	5	Georgia	D2/03	16/12
52	Johnny Baldwin	6-2/232		R	Alabama A&M	D5/07	—
99	Anthony Cannon	6-0/224	12/31/84	2	Tulane	D7b/06	12/0
55	Donte Curry	6-1/240	7/22/78	7	Morris Brown	W-Was/02	16/0
54	Teddy Lehman	6-1/238	11/18/81	4	Oklahoma	D2/04	4/0
53	Paris Lenon	6-2/235	11/26/77	6	Richmond	FA/06	16/16
59	Alex Lewis	6-0/227	6/11/81	4	Wisconsin	D5/04	11/2
50	Ernie Sims	6-0/230	12/23/84	2	Florida State	D1/06	16/16
DEFENSIVE BACKS							
42	Gerald Alexander (S)	6-0/204	6/28/84	R	Boise State	D2c/07	—
44	Idrees Bashir (S)	6-2/198	12/7/78	7	Memphis	FA/06	0/0
41	Tony Beckham (CB)	6-1/198	10/1/78	5	Wisconsin-Stout	FA/07	0/0
25	Fernando Bryant (CB)	5-11/184	3/26/77	9	Alabama	FA/04	10/10
27	Daniel Bullocks (S)	6-0/212	2/28/83	2	Nebraska	D2/06	15/7
33	A.J. Davis (CB)	5-10/192	5/29/83	R	N.C. State	D4a/07	—
21	Travis Fisher (CB)	5-10/189	9/12/79	6	Central Florida	FA/07	9/9
26	Kenoy Kennedy (S)	6-1/215	11/15/77	8	Arkansas	FA/05	10/9
32	Dee McCann (CB)	5-10/198	4/24/83	2	West Virginia	D6/06	0/0
38	Ramzee Robinson (CB)	5-10/186	2/20/84	R	Alabama	D7/07	—
23	Keith Smith (CB)	5-11/192	3/20/80	4	McNeese State	D3/04	16/0
33	Stanley Wilson (CB)	5-11/185	11/5/82	3	Stanford	D3/05	13/4
SPECIALISTS							
4	Jason Hanson (K)	6-0/190	6/17/70	16	Washington State	D2b/92	16/0
2	Nick Harris (P)	6-2/218	7/23/78	7	California	FA/03	16/0

Abbreviations: D1-draft pick, first round; W-claimed on waivers; T-obtained in trade; FA-free-agent acquisition.

# PACKERS

**They're relying on a young roster to take a big step, but they may be a year away from advancing to the playoffs**

**SN PICK** 2nd, NFC North (8-8)

By TOM SILVERSTEIN

Judging from the dust on his wallet, it's apparent general manager Ted Thompson saw something other than a bit of good fortune as the reason for his team's 4-0 finish last season.

Something so encouraging that he's wagering the success of the 2007 season on it.

The Packers were mall walkers during the prime free-agent months, choosing to march past the shopping frenzy and ignore the need to add a veteran running back, wide receiver and tight end.

Thompson and coach Mike McCarthy want to take a roster that was the

youngest in the NFL last season—and may again be the youngest this year—and let it mature like a well-balanced mutual fund.

"I'm not saying we're just going on a wing and a prayer here, but you do have to give those guys a little freedom to develop," Thompson says.

If quarterback Brett Favre is going to have a shot at reaching his 11th postseason, the team will have to improve from within.

## OFFENSE

There will be only minor changes to the scheme under Joe Philbin, who was promoted to coordinator in January. McCarthy runs a Bill Walsh-style West Coast offense that incorporates a zone-blocking running game.

The changes will be made to the protection schemes with more emphasis placed on the ground game. The Packers ran just 39.7 percent of the time in McCarthy's first season. As the play-caller, it will be McCarthy's decision when to stick with, or abandon, the run.

**Quarterbacks**—Favre didn't come back for his 17th season to repeat his 56.0 percent completion performance of last year. Dropped passes were a significant factor, but so was Favre's decision making. Often when the team fell behind he tried to get everything back at once, which resulted in untimely interceptions.

McCarthy intends to use fewer seven-man protections so Favre will have more receiving options and be able to dump off the ball to

Favre

## SCHEDULE

All times Eastern

Sept. 9	PHILADELPHIA	1:00
Sept. 16	at N.Y. Giants	1:00
Sept. 23	SAN DIEGO	1:00
Sept. 30	at Minnesota	1:00
Oct. 7	CHICAGO	8:15
Oct. 14	WASHINGTON	1:00
Oct. 21	Open date	
Oct. 29	at Denver*	8:30
Nov. 4	at Kansas City	1:00
Nov. 11	MINNESOTA	1:00
Nov. 18	CAROLINA	1:00
Nov. 22	at Detroit†	12:30
Nov. 29	at Dallas†	8:15
Dec. 9	OAKLAND	1:00
Dec. 16	at St. Louis	1:00
Dec. 23	at Chicago	1:00
Dec. 30	DETROIT	1:00

Strength of schedule: 23rd

\*Monday †Thursday

Analysis of every Packers game:  
sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom

## REGULAR-SEASON WINS



ALBERT DICKSON / SN

running backs when there's pressure up the middle. His ability to make plays on the run isn't what it used to be, but he figures to be in less pain following offseason ankle surgery.

The club still is backing Aaron Rodgers, but he's coming off a broken foot and needs to do something this preseason to prove he can be Favre's successor. Rodgers is fairly accurate from the pocket but needs to be less mechanical and show he can throw on the run.

Third-stringer Ingle Martin is a raw prospect with a strong arm and quick mind. He needs to improve his accuracy.

## GRADE: B

**Running backs**—McCarthy would like to get the running game to the point where the team can stick anybody in and get 1,000 yards. It's far from that goal right now, which could spell disaster.

Ahman Green is gone, and there isn't anyone on the returning roster with his one-cut ability. Vernand Morency is a threat in the open field, but he has to get there first. He needs to be more disciplined in maintaining his footwork and following through on his cuts.

Though Morency is the favorite to be the starter, second-round pick Brandon Jackson might be a better fit for the zone system and could earn considerable carries. A good inside runner, Jackson has excellent instincts but not a lot of speed.

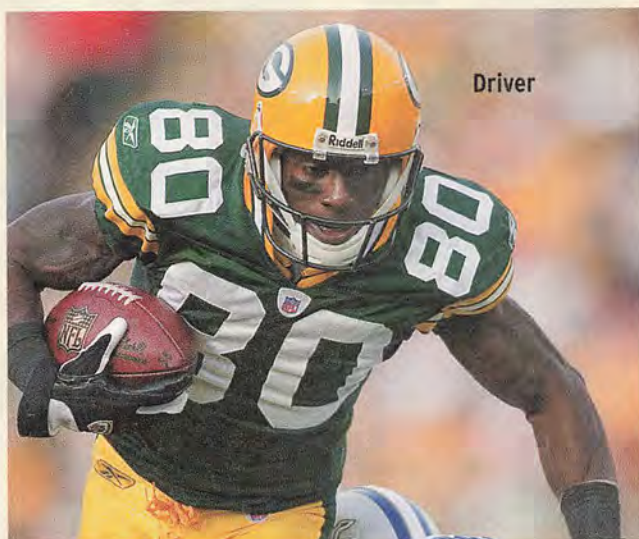
Noah Herron is best-suited for a third-down role because of his blocking ability, although he isn't a home run threat as a receiver out of the backfield. The club will take a long look at Arliss Beach, a big back who hits the hole quickly, and P.J. Pope, who was impressive on the practice squad.

Fullback Brandon Miree fits the mold of the quick-footed blocker the system needs. But if he doesn't pan out, there isn't much behind him. Sixth-round pick Korey Hall will try to move from linebacker to fullback. **GRADE: D**

**Receivers**—The unit as a whole needs to be more productive; last season the Packers led the NFL in drops, ranked near the bottom in red zone success and only had one receiver with more than three touchdown catches.

Donald Driver is fearless going across the middle and reads Favre like a book, but neither Driver nor No. 2 receiver Greg

## SCOUTING REPORTS: OFFENSE



Driver

JAY DROWNS / SN

### Brett Favre, QB

**Strengths:** Has great arm strength. Plays hurt and suffers no drop-off in production. Makes great presnap reads and excels at working through his progressions. Has a quick release and great pocket presence. Buys himself time with his footwork.

**Weaknesses:** Can be overconfident in his ability. Runs hot-and-cold. Forces some throws and puts the ball up for grabs. Can run a little but has lost some foot speed.

**Bottom line:** Favre isn't the player he was even two years ago, but he still has a strong arm and a gunslinger mentality. The Packers might have surrounded him with enough talent to make one more playoff run before he retires. **Grade: 7.5**

### Vernand Morency, RB

**Strengths:** Has terrific athleticism and speed. Displays great skills as a receiver.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to get stronger and be more willing to grind out yards inside. Must become a more patient runner. Not a great blocker.

**Bottom line:** Morency has all the ability in the world but struggles mentally to grasp the NFL game and is only a backup-caliber player. **Grade: 5.5**

### \*Brandon Jackson, RB

**Strengths:** Athletic and sees the field well. Shows the patience to wait for blocks and make cuts. Has nice hands as a receiver and adjusts to off-target passes.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks the explosiveness

to produce long touchdown runs. Must secure the ball better in traffic and improve his pass blocking. Has durability issues.

**Bottom line:** Jackson could become a punishing runner if he lowers his shoulders more frequently—and stays healthy. The Pack lacks depth at running back, so he could have a chance to start as a rookie.

### Brandon Miree, FB

**Strengths:** Strong, with good size. Plays with leverage. A powerful blocker who can pick up blitzers and finish blocks.

**Weaknesses:** A limited weapon on offense. Doesn't possess breakaway speed and has only adequate receiving skills.

**Bottom line:** Miree steps into the starting role for now but is primarily a blocking back who must improve his ball skills if he wants to play a larger role in the offense. **Grade: 7.7**

### ↑ Donald Driver, WR

**Strengths:** Runs smooth routes, accelerates out of his breaks and gets good separation. Usually gets a clean release against press coverage. Has good instincts for finding open spots in zones.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal upper-body strength and can be muscled off his routes. Loses focus and occasionally drops easy throws. Gives an inconsistent effort as a blocker.

**Bottom line:** Driver will continue to be Favre's go-to guy in the passing game, and the emergence of Jennings will only help his production. **Grade: 6.5**

## FANTASY SOURCE PICKS

**STUD**  
WR Donald Driver

**SLEEPER**  
RB Brandon Jackson

**STUMBLER** ▶  
TE Bubba Franks

**RISK/REWARD**  
QB Brett Favre

**DRAFT-DAY BARGAIN**  
WR Greg Jennings



ALBERT DICKSON / SN

Fantasy Source Football is your online fantasy authority. Go to [fantasy.sportingnews.com/nfl](http://fantasy.sportingnews.com/nfl).

Players are graded by War Room scouts on a 1-10 scale.  
 \*Rookies (not graded)

### ↑ Greg Jennings, WR

**Strengths:** Has deceptive speed; doesn't get caught from behind. Runs crisp routes and gets in and out of his cuts without slowing. Shows good vision and recognition skills. Makes tacklers miss in the open field.

**Weaknesses:** Has below-average size and strength. Will struggle against physical defensive backs.

**Bottom line:** Jennings showed enough polish to draw coverage away from Driver as a rookie but struggled later in the year because of an ankle injury. He's expected to develop into a fine starter. **Grade: 7.2**

### ↓ Bubba Franks, TE

**Strengths:** Has good size. Shows good focus and reliable hands. Has a feel for zone coverage. Uses his big frame to get position underneath. Can be effective in the red zone.

**Weaknesses:** Hasn't created enough mismatches in the open field. Lacks top-end speed and doesn't produce much after the catch. Not always physical and doesn't consistently reach his second-level assignments.

**Bottom line:** Franks has been asked to take on more blocking responsibilities and has fallen off as a weapon in the offense. **Grade: 6.2**

### Chad Clifton, T

**Strengths:** Has an excellent combination of size and athleticism. Plays with outstanding technique. Smooth enough to handle counter moves yet anchors well against bull rushers. Gets leverage on run blocks and has enough strength to create movement. Has quick feet and takes good angles.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks an explosive punch at the point of attack. Gives an inconsistent effort after contact. Can struggle some with quick edge rushers.

**Bottom line:** Clifton is a better pass protector than run blocker, but he's a smart player and keeps Favre upright. **Grade: 8.0**

### Mark Tauscher, T

**Strengths:** Big, smart and technically sound. Has a keen understanding of blocking angles and leverage. Excels at using his strong hands to lock on and steer defenders. Plays to the whistle and seldom makes mental mistakes.

**Weaknesses:** Has slow feet and short arms. Doesn't create a lot of movement in the running game. Has inconsistent footwork in pass protection and is vulnerable to inside moves. Must overcommit to the outside to handle speed.

**Bottom line:** Tauscher doesn't look pretty, but he is a better athlete than he is given credit for and is a very good player. **Grade: 7.5**

### ↑ Daryn Colledge, G

**Strengths:** Has excellent strength and quick feet. Plays with balance and leverage. Very athletic for a lineman. Shows good technique, particularly in pass protection. A smart player and natural leader.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal bulk. Can be pushed out of the play at the point of attack.

**Bottom line:** Colledge stepped into a starting role as a rookie and is a very good fit for the zone-blocking scheme. If he gets a little bigger, he could be a productive starter. **Grade: 6.8**

### ↑ Jason Spitz, G

**Strengths:** Has good size and speed. Shows good initial burst after the snap and uses his hands well. A strong run blocker near the line. Has good awareness of stunts and blitzes.

**Weaknesses:** Has trouble changing direction. Doesn't always play with balance and leverage. Struggles to block moving targets in the open field.

**Bottom line:** Spitz may be better suited to playing center but has filled the Pack's hole at guard. He's a smart, tough player who makes up for his lack of elite athleticism with hard work. **Grade: 6.5**

### Scott Wells, C

**Strengths:** Comes off the ball quickly and gets his hands on the defender. Plays with great leverage. Understands angles and has the lower-body strength to drive defenders out of the hole. Plays hard and is smart.

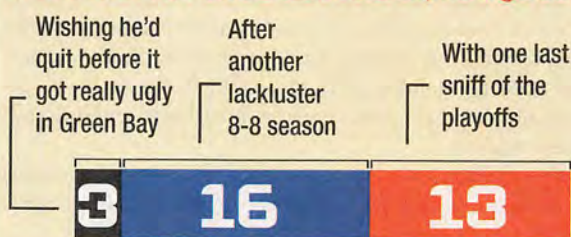
**Weaknesses:** Lacks true bulk. Can be overpowered in one-on-one pass-rush situations.

**Bottom line:** Wells is an improved player in the Pack's scheme and will only get better with more playing experience. **Grade: 7.0**

**KEY:** ↑ Ascending ↓ Descending

## INSIDERS POLL

If this is Brett Favre's last season, he'll go out:



Based on a poll of SN's 32 team correspondents

## BOLD PREDICTIONS

- 1 The club will pay for G.M. Ted Thompson's lack of attention to the running back position and will struggle all year to find someone who can consistently gain positive yards.
- 2 WR/KR Shaun Bodiford will be the surprise of training camp and emerge as a big-play threat on special teams. Bodiford has great open-field ability and also could contribute on offense.
- 3 TE Bubba Franks won't rebound from his awful 2006 season. If he holds on to his roster spot, he'll be relegated to a blocking role. The position will be a weakness this season.

Jennings is big enough to have an impact in the red zone. Jennings had a terrific start to his rookie season, but a midseason ankle injury limited his success on his favored in-and-out routes.

In order to get better, the Packers have to get bigger. If third-round pick James Jones, a big (6-1, 207), physical receiver in the mold of Sterling Sharpe, picks up the offense quickly, he could help. So could Carlyle Holiday (6-2, 220), who came on late last season.

Amid all the competition, Ruell Martin, a possession receiver with limited speed, will struggle to hold on to the No. 3 job. Similarly, Robert Ferguson is expected to play more on special teams and have a decreased role on offense. Shaun Bodiford, who's coming off a broken leg, has explosiveness the other receivers lack and could contribute out of the slot.

It won't be easy to replace free-agent departee David Martin's contributions as a pass-catching tight end. Donald Lee has better receiving skills than Tory Humphrey but hasn't shown he can be a reliable threat. Starter Bubba Franks looked like he might be finished last year, but his superior blocking ability will make it hard to release him. **GRADE: C+**

**Line**—It wasn't ideal for the team to start three rookies—Daryn Colledge, Jason Spitz and Tony Moll—last year. They had their struggles, especially in the running game, where their lack of strength was evident.

But the strategy might pay dividends this year. McCarthy plans to leave the linemen on their own more often in pass protection.

Colledge is expected to start at left guard, with Spitz at right guard and Moll serving as the backup at both tackle spots. Spitz



will do what it takes to get defenders on the ground, but he has trouble drive blocking in the running game and anchoring in pass protection. Moll's technique likely will improve as he gets stronger.

Tackles Chad Clifton and Mark Tauscher remain a big reason why Favre has stayed healthy, but they aren't natural fits for the zone system. The club will sacrifice whatever the two starters give up in the running game for what they offer as pass blockers. Clifton, in particular, regularly shuts down opposing ends at left tackle.

Center Scott Wells has developed nicely, especially in terms of making line calls. He won't blow anyone off the line but is consistent.

Most of the backups are young and unproven. Tackle Josh Bourke has size (6-7, 314) and nastiness and could be Clifton's successor. Guard Tony Palmer plays with good explosiveness.

**GRADE: B-**

## DEFENSE

Unless he gets the secondary cleaned up, coordinator Bob Sanders again will be under fire. Sanders mostly uses the front four to provide pressure but is exploring new blitzes for his speedy linebackers.

The team will stick with its quarters-coverage scheme, in which the cornerbacks play a heavy dose of bump-and-run and the linebackers spread out to take away throwing lanes. It's crucial for the secondary to avoid the broken coverages it regularly suffered from last season.

**Line**—This is the sturdiest unit on the team, and it will be leaned on heavily.

The club is banking on tackle Cullen Jenkins' switch to right end making the group even better. Jenkins offers more in the running game than Kabeer Gbaja-Biamila, whom Jenkins replaced as a starter at the end of last season. The team hopes the added rest will allow Gbaja-Biamila to regain his pass-rush prowess.

On passing downs, Jenkins will move inside, where his quick first step is especially effective. That will allow the Packers to have Aaron Kampman, Gbaja-Biamila and Jenkins on the field together to pressure quarterbacks. Kampman, the unit's newly anointed star, had a breakout 2006 season; he was solid against the run and had 15½ sacks.

## SECRET WEAPON

### DARYN COLLEDGE, LG

He is expected to make the most improvement of any player on the team next season. Colledge needs to improve his upper-body strength to be more effective jamming pass rushers and blocking down on defensive tackles. But his speed and agility make him a perfect fit for the Packers' zone-blocking system.



MATTHEW KUTZ / SN ARCHIVES

## SCOUTING REPORTS: DEFENSE

### ↑ Aaron Kampman, E

**Strengths:** Plays with good leverage and has outstanding read-and-react ability. Uses his hands well and sheds blockers quickly. A strong tackler who wraps up. Has a nice stab move and will get sacks by using good body lean. Durable.

**Weaknesses:** Not an elite athlete. Can be run at and struggles with bigger players at the point of attack. Can be broken down inside against the run.

**Bottom line:** The Packers' top pass rusher last season, Kampman only looks to be getting better. **Grade: 7.7**

### Cullen Jenkins, E

**Strengths:** Anticipates snaps, explodes into gaps and diagnoses plays quickly. Has good upper-body strength and plays with leverage. Has good lateral quickness. Disengages quickly and runs hard to the ball. A powerful pass rusher; can collapse the pocket and execute a variety of moves.

**Weaknesses:** Not truly strong and can be forced off the ball by double-teams. Can be driven to the ground if he misses with his hands.

**Bottom line:** Jenkins' natural pass-rush ability and stoutness against the run make him an ideal replacement for Kabeer Gbaja-Biamila in the starting lineup. **Grade: 6.8**

### Ryan Pickett, T

**Strengths:** Physical, with good size. Tough to move once he establishes position. Plays with a wide base, maintains separation and can occupy multiple blockers. Athletic and can shoot the inside gap. Can be a powerful bull rusher.

**Weaknesses:** Doesn't make enough big plays and seems to wear down. Quits on some plays. Doesn't redirect effectively and lacks pass-rush moves.

**Bottom line:** Pickett is an effective interior run stuffer when he's fresh but must improve his endurance and effort to take the next step. **Grade: 7.0**

### Corey Williams, T

**Strengths:** Remarkably quick and explosive for a player with his size and strength. Will disrupt running plays in the backfield. Has good diagnostic skills and changes direction quickly. Can collapse the pocket.

**Weaknesses:** Must improve his hand usage. Doesn't actively disengage

blockers or show many pass-rush moves. Lacks ideal edge-rushing speed.

**Bottom line:** The light came on for Williams in 2006 as he developed into a full-time starter who can generate an inside pass rush and stop the run.

**Grade: 6.6**

### ↑ A.J. Hawk, LB

**Strengths:** Has elite speed, athleticism and great instincts. Attacks the line and is physical at the point of attack. Shows great range and takes nice angles. Wraps up and explodes through tackles. Shows great blitz instincts and a closing burst as a pass rusher. Matches up well with tight ends and running backs on underneath zones.

**Weaknesses:** Must gain lower-body strength to hold his ground at the point of attack. Doesn't have fluid hips and will struggle in man coverage.

**Bottom line:** Hawk has the tools to develop into one of the top players in the game at his position. With a year's experience, he must take big strides and make more big plays. **Grade: 8.6**

### Nick Barnett, LB

**Strengths:** A high-motor player with good instincts. Has sideline-to-sideline range and the ability to change direction quickly. Can run with most tight ends and backs in man-to-man coverage. Reads quarterbacks' eyes in zone coverage and accelerates quickly to the ball. A strong tackler.

**Weaknesses:** Doesn't have the size or strength to hold up when teams regularly run at him. Won't step up and fill and can be engulfed by bigger linemen. Occasionally overpursues.

**Bottom line:** Barnett is an explosive, if undersized, starter who will continue to improve. He's better suited to play outside but will stay in the middle until the Packers develop a replacement. **Grade: 7.9**

### Brady Poppinga, LB

**Strengths:** A smart player who puts himself in good position. Has a non-stop motor. A big-time hitter, with good short-area explosion into the ballcarrier.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to improve his strength at the point of attack. Can be engulfed on inside runs. Needs to stay healthy.

## SCOUT TAKES

## A scout from another team sizes up the Packers

The thing that jumps out for me the most is that **Charles**

**Woodson** has quietly gotten back to

being an elite cornerback. He played

almost all of last season with shoulder

and other ailments, but he put a whole

lot of people on lockdown. ... **Cullen**

**Jenkins** is an emerging guy. He's good

against the run and the pass, and his

overall technique is steadily improving.

He has made the conversation where

he's not Kris' little brother any more; he's

Cullen. ... I don't think **Brett Favre** has declined anywhere

outside the color of his hair. He's still most effective in situa-

tions where he has a chance to win. When the game is on the

line, that's when he's at his best. ... I like **A.J. Hawk**. The main

thing he needs to do is just continue to improve technique-

wise, which will help him improve his reads.



Woodson

JAY DROWNS / SN



Harris

MATTHEW KUTZ / SN ARCHIVES

player in the Packers' secondary, but at 32, he might be entering the downside of his career. **Grade: 7.7**

#### ↓ Charles Woodson, CB

**Strengths:** Has an outstanding combination of size and athleticism. Uses his hands fairly well and has the upper-body strength to jam receivers. Opens his hips well. Fast enough to run with most receivers and tall enough to challenge for jump balls.

**Weaknesses:** Extremely inconsistent and has had problems staying healthy. Appears to take plays off. Lacks discipline and will give up big plays because he gambles too often.

**Bottom line:** Woodson has outstanding physical tools, but his age and injury are concerns. He has some mileage left but is on the decline. **Grade: 7.5**

#### ↑ Nick Collins, S

**Strengths:** Has good quickness and the range to make plays on the sideline. Has outstanding ball skills and a burst to close on passes. Adept at getting into the box in run support.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to wrap up better as a tackler. Has some stiffness to his

hips and will lose his assignment in man coverage.

**Bottom line:** Collins has made strides, but the Pack got burned in the passing game repeatedly in 2006 and needs him to show greater recognition skills in coverage. **Grade: 7.5**

#### ↓ Marquand Manuel, S

**Strengths:** Has good size and power. Strong at the point of attack. Fills hard against the run and hits with pop.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks speed, quickness and change-of-direction skills. Has marginal ball skills and can't be trusted in deep zone coverage or man.

**Bottom line:** Manuel is a physical presence but lacks ideal coverage skills. The Packers will look to replace him sooner than later. **Grade: 6.1**

**Bottom line:** Poppinga became a starter in 2006, and his instincts and playmaking ability make him a good fit in the Packers' scheme. **Grade: 6.9**

#### ↓ Al Harris, CB

**Strengths:** Has long arms, good upper-body strength and a physical style. Excels in press coverage; delivers a blow and has the burst to stay with his man after the bump. Can close quickly in a short area. Has good leaping ability and ball skills. A reliable tackler.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks top-end speed. Can't hold up isolated against good receivers for long stretches. Will gamble and get overaggressive. Can be beaten by a good double move.

**Bottom line:** Harris remains the best

Playing the run will be the line's biggest challenge because most of the linemen aren't physical specimens. The addition of first-round pick Justin Harrell will help; if he can shake durability issues, he'll give the club another big body up front. Harrell is expected to compete with Corey Williams for the starting spot opposite nose tackle Ryan Pickett. Williams improved more than any other lineman last season but must read plays better.

Pickett won't provide much pass rush but was the team's most effective run stopper last year. Backup Colin Cole weighs 320 pounds but still can be washed out of plays.

In passing situations, the fourth lineman will be Williams, who had seven sacks in 2006, or Johnny Jolly, who came on strong late. **GRADE: A-**

**Linebackers**—If the defense takes a turn for the better, it will be because A.J. Hawk plays to his star status, Nick Barnett starts making game-changing plays and Brady Poppinga adjusts to covering tight ends and backs.

Though he's as fast as any linebacker in the division, Hawk was tentative as he adjusted to the scheme as a rookie. He's expected to make more big plays this year. If Sanders is smart, he'll blitz Hawk regularly because that's where Hawk is at his best.

Like Hawk, Barnett was solid but not spectacular, although he showed his toughness by playing the last five games with a broken hand. Barnett can cover lots of ground and has greatly improved in coverage, but sometimes he commits mental errors because he's too intense.

The coaches love Poppinga's passion and energy, but he can't make a career out of playing in traffic. An end in college, he still is adjusting to man coverage and is too stiff in the open field.

Backup Abdul Hodge didn't play as advertised as a rookie and needs to improve his lower-body strength. Special teams ace Tracy White provides depth. Undrafted rookie Rory



Johnson will be a fast, aggressive gem on the outside if he overcomes off-field issues. **GRADE: B**

**Secondary**—Eventually, Father Time will catch up with cornerbacks Al Harris, 32, and Charles Woodson, 30. But if they play the way they did last year, the club will be ecstatic.

Harris, a bump-and-run specialist, had perhaps his best season; he shut down some top receivers. One reason Woodson had a career-high eight interceptions is quarterbacks didn't throw the ball Harris' way often. Woodson got better as the year wore on but made some critical coverage errors early and lacked chemistry with the other defensive backs. He continues to rely on athleticism and football acumen.

Frank Walker was signed to be the No. 3 corner but faces stiff competition from Will Blackmon. Walker has good ball skills and can play the slot. Blackmon is a big, athletic corner whose rookie progress was slowed by injuries.

The safety position must improve greatly. Marquand Manuel was signed last year to lead the secondary; instead, he alienated himself because the other defensive backs thought he was a know-it-all. The fact he blew too many coverages didn't help.

Third-round pick Aaron Rouse and Marviel Underwood are the top candidates to unseat Manuel. Rouse is coming off a poor senior season and has to tackle better, but the club thinks he could become a physical force if he takes to coaching. The undersized Underwood (5-10, 197) can be relied on to be in the right position. He missed all of last year with a torn ACL.

Third-year pro Nick Collins has 4.35 speed, open-field tackling ability and a good work ethic but just doesn't make plays. Either he improves this season or the club will have to start looking for his replacement. Tyrone Culver is a solid player who relies more on smarts and instincts than speed and athleticism. With the addition of Rouse, Culver will have his hands full making the roster. **GRADE: C**

## SPECIAL TEAMS

Thompson went with two strong-legged greenhorns in the kicking game and paid the price because neither punter Jon Ryan nor kicker Dave Rayner had a very good year. Rayner and rookie sixth-round pick Mason Crosby are in for a heated battle. Both have very strong legs, so the winner will be determined

by who's most consistent on field goals. David Lonie, another long-baller, will compete with Ryan, who didn't have consistent drops and had too many line-drive punts. Long snapper Rob Davis remains steady.

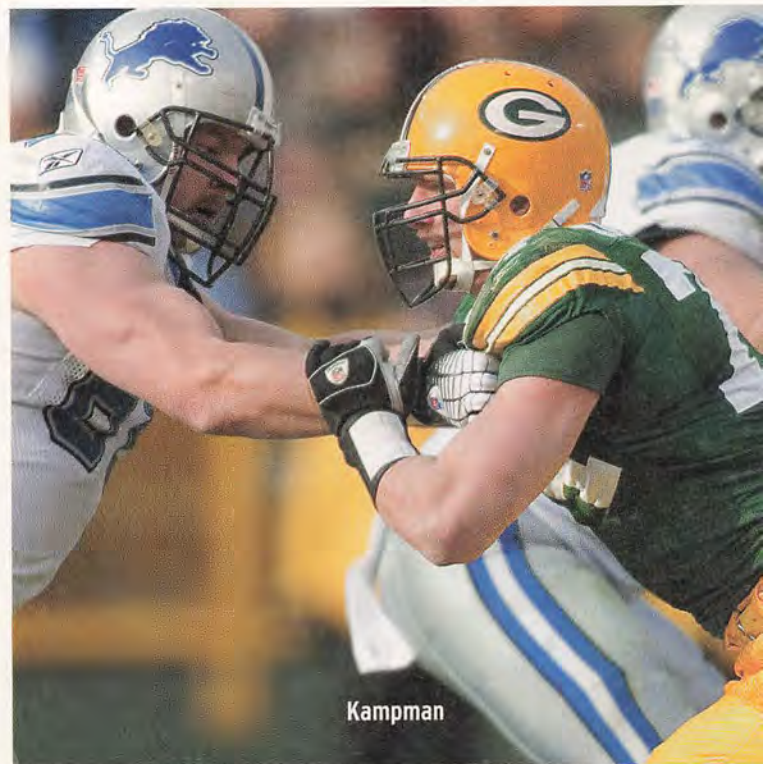
Finding a return man will be priority after the club

ranked among the NFL's worst in kickoff and punt return average. It hopes that Bodiford can handle both jobs and add explosiveness. But Woodson and Blackmon also have credentials as returners, so the competition is wide-open. **GRADE: D**

## BOTTOM LINE

This is a team that could surprise a lot of people if its young players mature and improve. But Favre isn't getting any younger, there aren't enough impact players and special teams remain a big question mark. More than likely, there will be considerable improvement in individual play, but as a team there aren't enough pieces in place to win 10 games. **SN**

*Tom Silverstein covers the Packers for the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel.*



Kampman

## KEY MOVES

### 2007 DRAFT PICKS

Rd.-Pick

**GRADE B-**

**1-16 Justin Harrell, DT, Tennessee**

A big, run-stuffing tackle who will compete for a starting spot.

**2-63 Brandon Jackson, RB, Nebraska**

A sturdy, instinctive runner. Likely to be a change-of-pace back.

**3-78 James Jones, WR, San Jose State**

Can be effective running slants and crossing routes. Not fast.

**3-89 Aaron Rouse, S, Virginia Tech**

Will have to be assignment-sure to challenge for a starting spot.

**4-119 Allen Barbre, OT, Missouri Southern**

Aggressive and versatile but needs to add bulk.

**5-157 David Clowney, WR, Virginia Tech**

Speedy and athletic; could be used as a return man.

**6-191 Korey Hall, FB, Boise State**

Switching from linebacker to fullback. Will play on special teams.

**6-192 Desmond Bishop, LB, California**

Strong but slow; a prototypical run stuffer.

**6-193 Mason Crosby, K, Colorado**

Will compete with Dave Rayner for the kicking job.

**7-228 DeShawn Wynn, RB, Florida**

A big back with good vision and speed, but he's a character risk.

**7-243 Clark Harris, TE, Rutgers**

A short-range receiver who also can be a long snapper.

## VETERAN PLAYERS

**Additions:** CB Frank Walker (FA/Giants).

**Losses:** RB Ahman Green (FA/Texans), TE David Martin (FA/Dolphins), FB William Henderson (FA).

## PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
QB	■ Brett Favre □ Aaron Rodgers □ Brandon Miree □ Corey Hall	LE	▲ Aaron Kampman □ Jason Hunter
FB	● Greg Jennings ● Robert Ferguson	NT	■ Ryan Pickett □ Colin Cole
RB	● Vernand Morency □ Brandon Jackson	DT	● Corey Williams ● Justin Harrell
WR	● Greg Jennings ● Robert Ferguson	RE	■ Cullen Jenkins ● K. Gbaja-Biamila
WR	▲ Donald Driver □ Ruell Martin	SLB	□ Brady Poppinga □ Rory Johnson
TE	■ Bubba Franks ● Donald Lee	MLB	■ Nick Barnett □ Abdul Hodge
LT	■ Chad Clifton □ Tony Moll	WLB	■ A.J. Hawk □ Tracy White
LG	● Daryn Colledge ● Jason Spitz	LCB	● Charles Woodson □ Will Blackmon
C	■ Scott Wells □ Tyson Walter	SS	□ Marquand Manuel ● Marviel Underwood
RG	● Jason Spitz □ Junius Coston	FS	● Nick Collins □ Tyrone Culver
RT	■ Mark Tauscher □ Tony Moll	RCB	■ Al Harris ● Frank Walker

## SPECIALISTS

K	□ Dave Rayner	KR	● Vernand Morency
P	□ Jon Ryan	PR	● Charles Woodson
		LS	■ Rob Davis

▲ Elite ■ Solid ● Adequate □ Fringe

Depth charts updated weekly at [sportingnews.com](http://sportingnews.com)

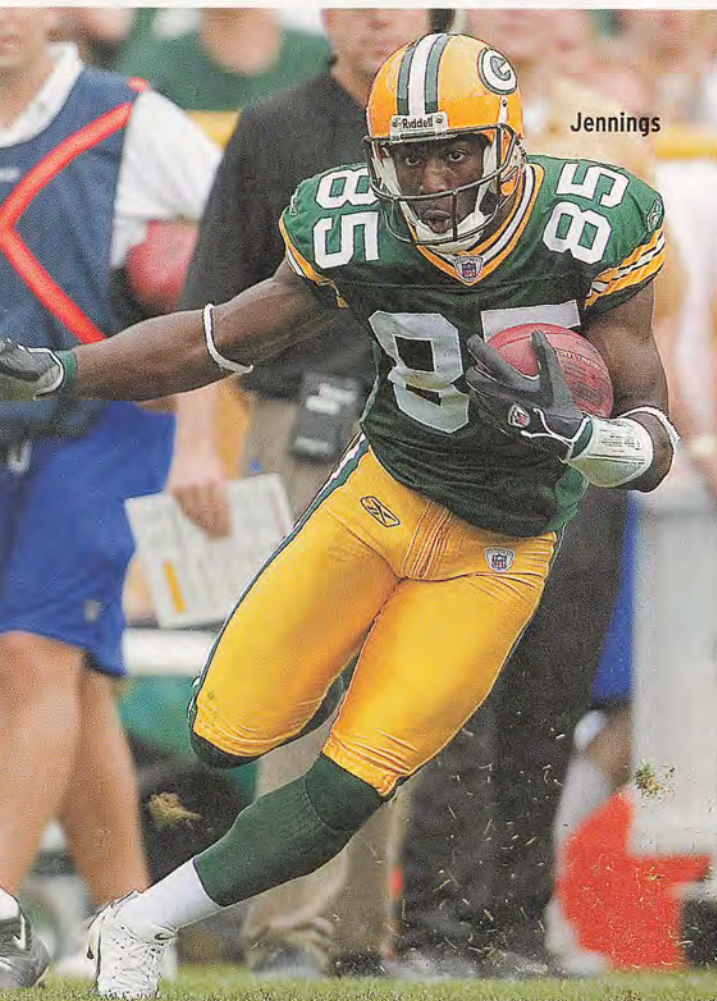
## PACKERS ROSTER

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL exp.	College	How acq.	2006 GP/GS
QUARTERBACKS							
8	Todd Bouman	6-2/226	8/1/72	10	St. Cloud State	FA/06	0/0
4	Brett Favre	6-2/224	10/10/69	17	Southern Miss	T-Alt/92	16/16
7	Ingle Martin	6-2/224	8/15/82	2	Furman	D5a/06	1/0
12	Aaron Rodgers	6-2/223	12/2/83	3	California	D1/05	2/0
RUNNING BACKS							
32	Arless Beach	5-10/222	3/28/84	2	Kentucky	FA/06	0/0
23	Noah Herron	5-11/218	4/3/82	3	Northwestern	FA/05	16/0
32	Brandon Jackson	5-10/212	10/2/85	R	Nebraska	D2/07	—
40	Brandon Miree (FB)	6-0/236	4/14/81	3	Pittsburgh	FA/06	10/3
34	Vernand Morency	5-10/212	2/4/80	3	Oklahoma State	T-Hou/06	14/2
28	P.J. Pope	5-9/212	2/26/84	2	Bowling Green	FA/06	1/0
42	DeShawn Wynn	5-10/232	10/9/83	R	Florida	D7a/07	—
RECEIVERS							
49	Zac Alcorn (TE)	6-4/255	8/24/80	2	Black Hills State	FA/06	6/0
19	Shaun Bodiford	5-11/186	5/4/82	2	Portland State	W-De/06	6/0
11	David Clowney	6-0/188	7/8/85	R	Virginia Tech	D5/07	—
80	Donald Driver	6-0/192	2/27/75	9	Alcorn State	D7b/99	16/16
89	Robert Ferguson	6-1/210	12/17/79	7	Texas A&M	D2/01	4/1
83	Chris Francies	6-1/193	7/26/82	2	UTEP	FA/06	6/0
88	Bubba Franks (TE)	6-6/265	1/6/78	8	Miami	D1/00	16/14
44	Clark Harris (TE)	6-5/256	7/10/84	R	Rutgers	D7b/07	—
18	Carlyle Holiday	6-2/217	10/4/81	2	Notre Dame	W-Ari/06	4/0
84	Tory Humphrey (TE)	6-2/250	1/20/83	2	Central Michigan	FA/05	7/0
85	Greg Jennings	5-11/197	9/21/83	2	Western Michigan	D2b/06	14/11
89	James Jones	6-1/207	3/31/84	R	San Jose State	D3a/07	—
86	Donald Lee (TE)	6-4/248	8/31/80	5	Mississippi State	FA/05	15/2
82	Ruell Martin	6-4/210	8/10/82	2	Saginaw Valley St.	FA/06	13/3
OFFENSIVE LINEMEN							
78	Allen Barbre (T/G)	6-4/300	6/22/84	R	Missouri Southern	D4/07	—
71	Kevin Barry (T)	6-4/335	7/20/79	6	Arizona	FA/02	0/0
67	Josh Bourke (T)	6-7/314	10/16/82	2	Grand Valley State	FA/06	0/0
76	Chad Clifton (T)	6-5/320	6/26/76	8	Tennessee	D2/00	15/15
73	Daryn Colledge (G/T)	6-4/305	2/11/82	2	Boise State	D2a/06	16/15
62	Junius Coston (G/T)	6-3/310	11/5/83	3	North Carolina A&T	D5a/05	1/0
60	Rob Davis (LS)	6-3/283	12/10/68	12	Shippensburg	FA/97	16/0
75	Tony Moll (G/T)	6-4/300	8/23/83	2	Nevada	D5b/06	16/10
64	Tony Palmer (G/C)	6-2/311	2/23/83	2	Missouri	W-STL/06	6/0
72	Jason Spitz (G/C)	6-3/300	12/19/82	2	Louisville	D3b/06	14/13
65	Mark Tauscher (T)	6-4/320	6/17/77	8	Wisconsin	D7a/00	11/11
70	Tyson Walter (G/T)	6-4/300	3/17/78	6	Ohio State	FA/06	7/0
63	Scott Wells (C)	6-2/300	1/7/81	4	Tennessee	D7/04	16/6
DEFENSIVE LINEMEN							
90	Colin Cole (T)	6-1/315	6/24/80	4	Iowa	FA/04	15/3
94	Kabeer Gbaja-Biamila (E)	6-4/252	9/24/77	8	San Diego State	D5a/00	16/13
91	Justin Harrell (T)	6-4/310	2/14/84	R	Tennessee	D1/07	—
57	Jason Hunter (E)	6-4/250	8/28/83	2	Appalachian State	FA/06	14/0
77	Cullen Jenkins (E/T)	6-2/292	1/20/81	4	Central Michigan	FA/04	14/5
93	Johnny Jolly (T)	6-3/310	2/21/83	2	Texas A&M	D6a/06	6/0
74	Aaron Kampman (E)	6-4/270	11/30/79	6	Iowa	D5a/02	16/16
96	Michael Montgomery (E)	6-5/265	8/18/83	3	Texas A&M	D6a/05	11/0
79	Ryan Pickett (T)	6-2/322	10/8/79	7	Ohio State	FA/06	16/16
99	Corey Williams (T)	6-4/310	8/17/80	4	Arkansas State	D6/04	16/11
LINEBACKERS							
56	Nick Barnett	6-2/233	5/27/81	5	Oregon State	D1/03	15/15
55	Desmond Bishop	6-2/241	7/24/84	R	California	D6b/07	—
35	Korey Hall	6-0/236	8/5/83	R	Boise State	D6a/07	—
50	A.J. Hawk	6-1/246	1/6/84	2	Ohio State	D1/06	16/16
55	Abdul Hodge	6-0/233	9/9/82	2	Iowa	D3a/06	8/1
51	Brady Poppinga	6-3/245	9/21/79	3	Brigham Young	D4b/05	16/12
48	Marcus Randall	6-1/232	3/14/82	2	LSU	FA/07	0/0
58	Ben Taylor	6-2/232	8/31/78	6	Virginia Tech	FA/06	10/0
59	Tracy White	6-0/230	4/14/81	5	Howard	FA/06	14/0
DEFENSIVE BACKS							
27	Will Blackmon (CB)	6-0/202	10/27/84	2	Boston College	D4b/06	4/0
20	Atari Bigby (S)	5-11/211	9/19/81	2	Central Florida	FA/06	5/0
24	Jarrett Bush (CB)	6-0/197	5/21/84	2	Utah State	W-Car/06	16/0
36	Nick Collins (S)	5-11/201	8/16/83	3	Bethune-Cookman	D2a/05	16/16
29	Tyrone Culver (S)	6-1/200	7/6/83	2	Fresno State	D6b/06	14/0
43	Patrick Dendy (CB)	6-0/190	3/10/82	3	Rice	FA/05	12/3
31	Al Harris (CB)	6-1/185	12/7/74	10	Texas A&M-Kingsville	T-Phi/03	16/16
22	Marquand Manuel (S)	6-0/209	7/11/79	6	Florida	FA/06	16/16
26	Charlie Peprah (S)	5-11/202	2/24/83	2	Alabama	W-NYG/06	8/0
37	Aaron Rouse (S)	6-4/223	1/8/84	R	Virginia Tech	D3b/07	—
25	Marviel Underwood (S)	5-10/197	2/17/82	3	San Diego State	D4a/05	0/0
41	Frank Walker (CB)	5-11/196	8/6/80	5	Tuskegee	FA/07	11/1
21	Charles Woodson (CB)	6-1/200	10/7/76	10	Michigan	FA/06	16/16
SPECIALISTS							
2	Mason Crosby (K)	6-1/212	9/3/84	R	Colorado	D6c/07	—
16	Dave Rayner (K)	6-2/209	10/26/82	3	Michigan State	W-Ind/06	16/0
9	Jon Ryan (P)	6-0/202	11/26/81	2	University of Regina	FA/06	16/0

Abbreviations: D1-draft pick, first round; W-claimed on waivers; T-obtained in trade; FA-free-agent acquisition.



JAY DROWNS / SN



ALBERT DICKSON / SN



MINNESOTA

NFC

## VIKINGS

**The team will need extraordinary patience before an old-fashioned rebuilding plan pays dividends**

**SN PICK** 3rd, NFC North (6-10)

**By KEVIN SEIFERT**

In an era of quick fixes and short-term contracts, the Vikings have hunkered down and set out to rebuild their franchise the old-fashioned way. Owner Zygi Wilf has signed off on a process that, admittedly, will take several years to complete and require an extraordinary display of patience from personnel director Rick Spielman and coach Brad Childress.

Even after watching his team struggle to a 6-10 record last season, Wilf told the front office to take a selective approach to the free-agent market and focus primarily on the draft. The ongoing quarterback competition between Tarvaris Jackson and Brooks Bollinger, coupled with a roster that has not been improved dramatically, has the team's rabid fan base grumbling.

Wilf has pleaded for patience. "It will take a couple years until we can get into a position for championship-caliber competitiveness," he says. "Hopefully we can get there sooner. We can't expect that, but certainly we can hope for that."

Childress is more optimistic, primarily because he thinks two newcomers—tight end Visanthe Shiancoe and wide receiver Bobby Wade—are better fits for the schemes he installed last year.

## OFFENSE

Childress and coordinator Darrell Bevell have installed a conservative version of the West Coast offense. It relies on a heavy dose of running from the I-formation and a short passing game that emphasizes running after the catch. Childress called the plays last year. He had success with his scripted drives, but the offense too often fell out of rhythm as games progressed. Childress has considered handing the play-calling duties to Bevell, a move that would not require a significant transition because the pair are so close philosophically.

**Quarterbacks**—The team jettisoned Brad Johnson, who struggled in an offense that seemed tailor-made for his abilities. Johnson's departure left a void that will have to be filled by Jackson or Bollinger, neither of whom has succeeded at the pro level in this or any other scheme.

## SCHEDULE

*All times Eastern*

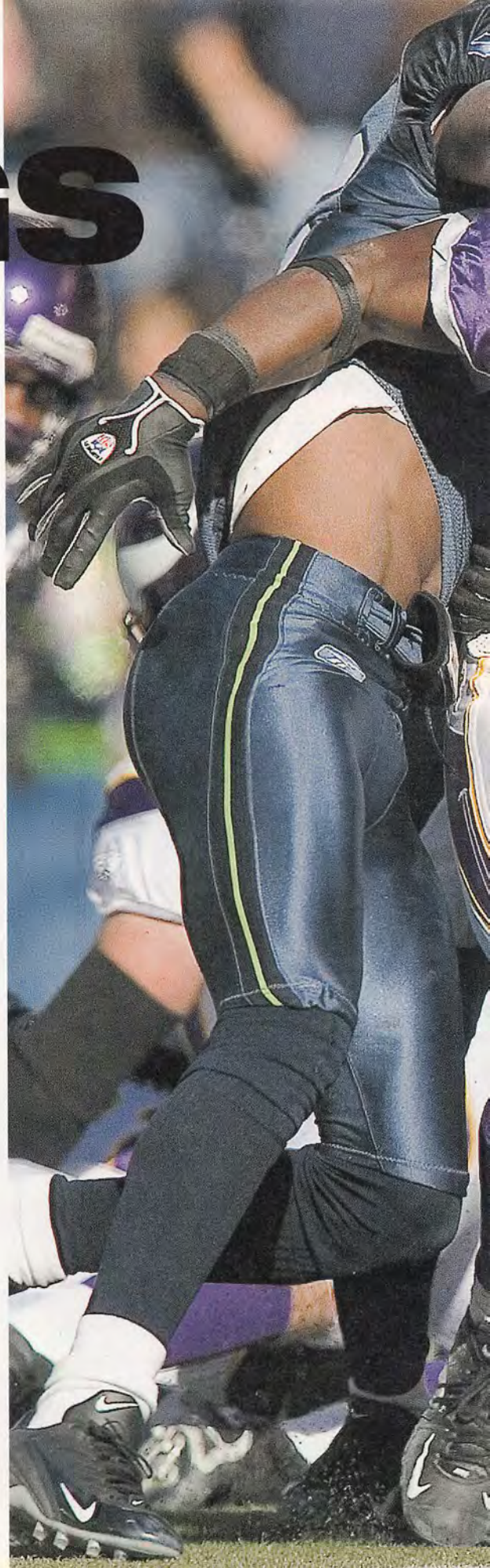
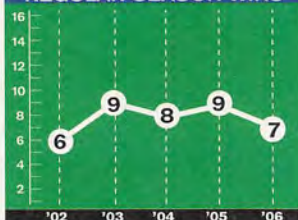
Sept. 9	ATLANTA	1:00
Sept. 16	at Detroit	4:05
Sept. 23	at Kansas City	1:00
Sept. 30	GREEN BAY	1:00
Oct. 7	Open date	
Oct. 14	at Chicago	1:00
Oct. 21	at Dallas	1:00
Oct. 28	PHILADELPHIA	1:00
Nov. 4	SAN DIEGO	1:00
Nov. 11	at Green Bay	1:00
Nov. 18	OAKLAND	1:00
Nov. 25	at N.Y. Giants	1:00
Dec. 2	DETROIT	1:00
Dec. 9	at San Francisco	4:05
Dec. 17	CHICAGO*	8:30
Dec. 23	WASHINGTON	1:00
Dec. 30	at Denver	4:15

Strength of schedule: T-18th

\*Monday

Analysis of every Vikings game:  
[sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom](http://sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom)

## REGULAR-SEASON WINS





Taylor

Jackson has all of the physical tools but struggled in two late-season starts. His steep learning curve from Division 1-AA Alabama State is his biggest obstacle. He must learn to harness his athleticism and understand that every pass play in the Vikings' system calls for him to throw to a specific spot.

Bollinger, who is entering his first training camp with the team, better understands Childress' philosophy, but it's clear the coach wants Jackson to win the job. Bollinger does not have a strong arm, and his slight 6-1 frame makes him vulnerable to injury. He probably is best suited to a reserve role.

The team entered training camp planning to give the well-traveled Drew Henson a chance to be No. 3 quarterback. Henson has better arm strength than Bollinger, but he lacks Bollinger's understanding of the game. **GRADE: D**

**Running backs**—Chester Taylor, a tough inside runner who can break the occasional big play outside, is a perfect fit in this system. Taylor also is a good natural receiver who catches the ball with his hands. The only concern about Taylor is the way he seemed to break down in the final month of 2006.

So the Vikings got help with the drafting of Oklahoma star Adrian Peterson in the first round. Peterson has the explosiveness this offense needs, and his breakaway speed will complement Taylor's tough inside game.

The team also could use Ciattrick Fason, Naufahu Tahi and Melde Moore in the rotation. Fason is a galloping runner who tends to run too upright. Tahi intrigues coaches because his 254-pound frame could provide a different look from a one-back set.

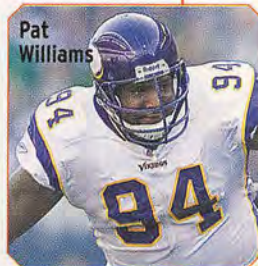
Concern about Moore's durability probably will relegate him to third-down duty again. Moore is an excellent receiver and, with his ability to make tacklers miss in the open field, is capable of taking a short swing pass and turning it into a first down.

Fullback Tony Richardson, who has recovered from a broken arm, still is a top-grade blocker and receiver out of the

## SCOUT TAKES

### A scout from another team sizes up the Vikings

**Pat Williams** and **Kevin Williams** form one of the best defensive tackle duos in the league. Pat has been underrated for a number of years. He's getting older, but he still produces. I thought Kevin would be strictly a pass rusher when he came out, but now I think he's one of the elite tackles in the NFC. ... With the additions of **Adrian Peterson** and **Sidney Rice**, what was a slow, plodding offense suddenly got a lot faster and more explosive. They have a home run hitter at running back with Peterson. ... **Antoine Winfield** is one of the most physical corners in the league. He's probably 180 pounds soaking wet, but he doesn't shy away from contact. ... If they don't ask **Tarvaris Jackson** to win games, I think they'll be OK. But if they get behind and need him to make four or five plays all by himself to win, I'm not sure he's ready to do that.



Pat Williams

TOM HAUCK FOR SN

backfield, but his playing time could suffer with the arrival of Peterson. **GRADE: B+**

**Receivers**—This is a problem area. The team's most proven performer is free-agent pickup Wade, who in four years with Chicago and Tennessee totaled 101 catches.

Coaches expect Wade to be effective in the slot position. He has the quickness to get off the line quickly and the open-field elusiveness to turn short receptions into big plays. The rest of the receiving unit is a work in progress.

Troy Williamson has 4.3 speed and excels on short crossing that allow him to run after the catch. The Vikings would love to see his speed translate into a big-play threat. But Williamson has had a lot of problems adjusting to deeper throws, prompting the team to look for ways to improve his hand-eye coordination. His promise will be short-lived if he can't overcome his coordination problems.

Veteran backup Billy McMullen might be asked to fill a bigger role, at least until draft picks Sidney Rice and Aundrae Allison are deemed ready. McMullen does not have the speed to get open regularly, but his height allows him to win fights for the ball near the sideline and he catches just about everything he can reach.

Rice (second-round pick out of South Carolina) and Allison (fifth-rounder out of East Carolina) are fast and explosive. Both will be quick-hit scoring threats when they adjust to the nuances of the NFL. Rice, who is 6-3 and has almost a 40-inch vertical leap, could be especially effective in the red zone.

The team signed Shiancoe to provide more speed and play-making ability in the middle of the field. Shiancoe is as fast as some receivers and has soft hands. He could emerge as the top downfield threat in a generally horizontal offense. Shiancoe's backup, Jim Kleinsasser, is primarily a blocker. **GRADE: D**

**Line**—Will the Vikings use a man- or zone-blocking scheme? That's a critical question because the team's personnel is best suited for man blocking and struggled last year with the liberal implementation of plays requiring zone blocking. The left side of the line—tackle Bryant McKinnie and guard Steve Hutchinson—are particularly good man blockers.

## FANTASY SOURCE PICKS

**SLEEPER**  
TE Visanthe Shiancoe

**STUMBLER**  
WR Bobby Wade

**RISK/REWARD**  
WR Troy Williamson

**DRAFT-DAY BARGAIN**  
Defense/special teams

**TOP NEWCOMER**  
RB Adrian Peterson

Fantasy Source Football is your online fantasy authority.  
Go to [fantasy.sportingnews.com/nfl](http://fantasy.sportingnews.com/nfl).

## SCOUTING REPORTS: OFFENSE



Jackson

MATTHEW KUTZ / SN ARCHIVES

### ↑ Tarvaris Jackson, QB

**Strengths:** Has good speed and size for the position. Has a strong arm and can get the ball downfield. Has the mobility and athleticism to work outside of the pocket.

**Weaknesses:** Doesn't show ideal pocket awareness and often makes poor choices. Must improve technique.

**Bottom line:** He's not as athletic as some believe; he's actually a pocket passer with a big arm and the mobility to buy himself time in the pocket. Jackson has outstanding physical tools and just needs a coach who can get the most out of his talents. **Grade: 6.4**

strength and power to break tackles and gain yards after first contact. Consistently makes big plays when he reaches the edge. Has the size and strength to run through linebackers. **Weaknesses:** Struggled to stay healthy in college. Runs upright and takes too much punishment. A liability as a pass blocker.

**Bottom line:** Peterson fell into a good situation with the Vikings. He can work in combination with Chester Taylor and ease into a feature back role. He'll need to run with a lower pad level to stay healthy.

### ↑ Chester Taylor, RB

**Strengths:** A solid player with good hands. Has good vision, patience and run instincts. Decisive; finds the seam quickly and hits the hole hard.

**Weaknesses:** Not a great inside runner. Struggles to make yards on his own. Can be overpowered in blitz pickups. Does not finish his runs with good leg drive.

**Bottom line:** Taylor's ability as both a runner and receiver make him a valuable player in the Vikings' offense. He must get stronger if he wants to hold up as a feature back in the NFL. **Grade: 7.5**

### ↓ Tony Richardson, FB

**Strengths:** Very smart and takes good angles to blocks. Very good in pass protection with a crisp, sharp punch.

**Weaknesses:** Has good hands but his receiving numbers are on the decline. Lacks the ability to sustain as a run blocker.

**Bottom line:** Richardson's true value is in the locker room—he's a good leader who plays hard every down. He's on the downside of his career. **Grade: 5.5**

### Bobby Wade, WR

**Strengths:** Has good quickness and acceleration. A smooth route runner who can use his hands and quickness to break press coverage. Has excellent body control and good leaping ability.

### \*Adrian Peterson, RB

**Strengths:** Runs aggressively with the

ALBERT DICKSON / SN

Players are graded by War Room scouts on a 1-10 scale.  
\*Rookies (not graded)

**Weaknesses:** Has marginal size and lacks ideal speed. A poor blocker. Inconsistent at beating coverage.

**Bottom line:** Wade had a solid 2006 season but is limited physically. He's more of a possession receiver than a playmaker. **Grade: 5.8**

### Troy Williamson, WR

**Strengths:** Has explosive speed and outstanding athleticism. A great leaper with the potential to be a factor near the sidelines and in the red zone. Has the speed to be a serious deep threat.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks technique and discipline. Struggles to get off press coverage. Not a crisp route runner and does not give prime effort all the time. Loses focus and concentration. **Bottom line:** Williamson has done nothing to justify the Vikings' decision to draft him in the first round. He will need better concentration and coordination to become more than a track star on the perimeter. **Grade: 5.5**

### Visanthe Shiancoe, TE

**Strengths:** Athletic, smooth and a hard worker. Has soft hands and good focus and can catch outside of his frame. A decent blocker who knows how to use his hands.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks quickness and acceleration to get a clean release off the line. Seems uncertain running routes and reading coverages. Lacks strength and gets little movement in the running game.

**Bottom line:** Shiancoe is strong and athletic with lots of upside. Though he has not been very productive to this point, he could shine as a starter for the Vikings. **Grade: 5.9**

### Bryant McKinnie, T

**Strengths:** Has great height, bulk and wingspan. Still learning how to use his long arms. Can maintain separation and force edge rushers wide. Has quick feet for a player his size. Sets quickly and shows improved leverage. Can be special in pass protection. A mauler at the point of attack.

**Weaknesses:** Gets sluggish and struggles with technique. Lacks great speed and isn't productive at the second level. Weight, flexibility and conditioning always will be concerns.

**Bottom line:** McKinnie looks the part and has steadily improved, but he needs to focus to take his game to the next level. **Grade: 7.3**

### Ryan Cook, T

**Strengths:** Has good size and upper-body strength. Uses long arms to control opponents in pass protection. Has speed and strength to stop speed rushers and uses strong upper body to thwart bull rushers.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal lower-body strength and doesn't always play with leverage. Must improve at reading stunts and blitzes.

**Bottom line:** Cook has the size and strength to hold his own in the trenches. But his upside is limited by a lack of ideal athleticism. **Grade: 5.9**

### Steve Hutchinson, G

**Strengths:** Gritty, efficient and technically sound. Seldom loses one-on-one battles when he gets position. Has long arms and powerful hands. Gets out quickly on pulls and traps. A feisty, relentless blocker who plays with balance and leverage in protection.

**Weaknesses:** Has some trouble hitting moving targets.

**Bottom line:** Hutchinson is the best guard in the NFL. **Grade: 9.0**

### Artis Hicks, G

**Strengths:** Has great physical make-up and good strength. Can dominate in the running game. Has decent athleticism and footwork. Can play several positions.

**Weaknesses:** Has problems with speed rushers. Tends to play straight-legged and has conditioning concerns. Lacks consistency in initial pass set.

**Bottom line:** Hicks, a mountain of a man, was a key to the rushing success the team had last year with Chester Taylor. **Grade: 6.9**

### Matt Birk, C

**Strengths:** Has elite speed, mobility and intelligence. Fires out of his stance and has a productive first step. Makes exceptional use of angles. Hits the moving target and can pull wide consistently. A terrific leader.

**Weaknesses:** Has had multiple surgeries. Lacks great bulk and strength. Occasionally gets driven back by huge tackles. Lacks mirror-and-slide skills.

**Bottom line:** If healthy, Birk is one of the game's top centers. **Grade: 8.5**

**KEY:** ↑ Ascending ↓ Descending

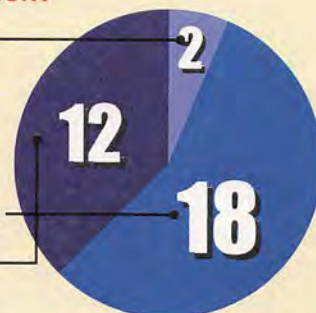
## INSIDERS POLL

### What can we expect from Tarvaris Jackson this season?

A lot more than the Vikings got from Brad Johnson in 2006

Occasional flashes of greatness, more evidence of inexperience

Some fine work with a clipboard



Based on a poll of SN's 32 team correspondents

## BOLD PREDICTIONS

**1** E.J. Henderson's move to the middle will weaken two positions. Henderson won't be as fluid as the departed Napoleon Harris. Henderson's weakside replacement, Chad Greenway, essentially is a rookie because an injury wiped out his first year.

**2** QBs Tarvaris Jackson and Brooks Bollinger both will get starts, but neither will be the answer—at least not in 2007.

**3** T Bryant McKinnie and G Steve Hutchinson will be a lot more comfortable working together and, as a result, will form the best left side in the league.

McKinnie's long arms and 6-8 frame make him almost impossible to beat one-on-one, especially in pass protection. But McKinnie is not always quick enough to find his man in a zone. Hutchinson, one of the NFL's top maulers, can survive in a zone scheme, but it's hard to understand why his team wouldn't allow him to do what he does best—manhandle opponents.

Center Matt Birk made a successful return in 2006 after two injury-filled years, though he needed some work to get the rust off. His intelligent approach makes him a valuable contributor no matter what scheme he's in.

The team will have more competition on the right side, where guard Artis Hicks and tackle Ryan Cook are the early favorites. Hicks has the ability to adapt to schemes and positions. He isn't strong in pass protection, but he's a load in the running game. Cook, a converted center, started the final three games last season at right tackle but has a lot to learn about playing on the outside.

The team is hashing through its backup options, though the versatility of Hicks and Cook will make things easier. Anthony Herrera, who is feisty but undersized, could be the top backup at guard and center. Marcus Johnson is a reserve option at right tackle. **GRADE: B**

### DEFENSE

New coordinator Leslie Frazier plans to maintain the team's 4-3 Tampa 2 scheme but will add more blitzes that have roots in the 46 defense he learned as a defensive back with the Bears in the '80s. Frazier hopes the increased blitzing will improve a pass defense that was tied for last in the league in yards allowed. He will need to



learn who his good blitzers are—linebacker Ben Leber and cornerback Cedric Griffin are two—and must make sure the blitzing doesn't compromise solid pass defense in the back end.

**Line**—This is a strong run-stuffing unit but doesn't get enough pressure on quarterbacks. The four starters combined for only 11½ sacks last season.

Tackles Kevin Williams and Pat Williams form the best run-stopping duo in the NFL. They excel in part because of a one-gap system that allows them to penetrate rather than read plays and account for two gaps. Pat Williams is not a good pass rusher, but his excellence against the run makes him one of the best first- and second-down tackles in the game. Kevin Williams is more well rounded. He will key any pass-rush revival by providing a consistent interior push.

A big reason for the inability to pressure the quarterback is that neither of the ends is a classic outside rusher. Left end Kenechi Udeze did not record a sack last season. He's too cautious and worried about his responsibilities against the run. Right end Darrion Scott occasionally penetrates the pocket, but he, too, is better against the run.

Erasmus James could supply help at end, but his recovery from knee surgery was slow in the offseason. Second-year end Ray Edwards has the potential to be an effective outside rusher, but his game needs polish.

Spencer Johnson, who backs up both tackles, is quick but too small to handle the position for an extended period. **GRADE: B**

**Linebackers**—This group has been reshuffled but has the pieces to be solid.

The team moved E.J. Henderson from the weak side to the middle, a position he struggled to fill in the past. But Henderson has matured during two successful seasons on the outside, and his role in a cover 2 does not carry quite as much responsibility in terms of play-calling. The question becomes whether Henderson can defend the deep middle of the field.

Taking Henderson's place on the weak side is Chad Greenway, who sat out most of his 2006 rookie season with a knee injury. Greenway will have a learning curve, but his preinjury speed and instincts make him a natural fit for the big-play position in this defense.

Leber is steady on the strong side and a good enough pass rusher to occasionally operate from a down position. Leber also

## SECRET WEAPON



### RAY EDWARDS, DE

He might be the team's best pure pass rusher. He ran into trouble in 2006 when opponents learned to anticipate his initial move, but line coach Karl Dunbar has been working hard with him on countermoves. Edwards could be a 10-sack player if the team uses him correctly in the rotation.

## SCOUTING REPORTS: DEFENSE

### Darrion Scott, E

**Strengths:** Has size, strength and initial quickness. Holds his ground and occupies blockers. Quick off the snap, gets position and works hard. Sniffs out screens.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks initial burst and acceleration off the edge. Misses open-field tackles and doesn't make enough plays in pursuit.

**Bottom line:** Scott is young and has the physical attributes to become a solid pass rusher. He's not there yet. **Grade: 6.9**

### Kenechi Udeze, E

**Strengths:** Has good size, quickness and power. Anticipates snaps and shows excellent body control turning the corner. Has an outstanding closing burst. Shows good instincts and discipline. A powerful tackler.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to develop more pass-rush moves. Must improve his technique and leverage. Lacks elite edge speed.

**Bottom line:** Udeze struggled after missing much of the 2005 season with an injury. He has a lot of upside but has not yet figured out how to tap into his talents. **Grade: 6.0**

### Kevin Williams, T

**Strengths:** Has an impressive frame and unusual speed and athleticism. Changes direction quickly and has terrific body control and an explosive burst through the hole. Has the upper-body power to knock back linemen. Finds the ball quickly and will pursue. A powerful tackler and a disruptive playmaker. A versatile high-character player.

**Weaknesses:** Doesn't always go all-out; sometimes seems to conserve energy. Lacks great bulk and can be engulfed.

**Bottom line:** Simply stated, Williams is dominant and a nice fit in the Vikings' 4-3 defense. **Grade: 9.2**

### Pat Williams, T

**Strengths:** Has outstanding bulk; almost impossible to move once he gets position. Can win with his first step, split double-teams and make plays in space. Has great recognition skills and a high motor; seldom takes false steps.

**Weaknesses:** Has had trouble with his weight and gets sluggish when out of condition. Lacks stamina and is getting older.

**Bottom line:** Williams is disruptive and one of the game's elite run-stuffers. He should continue to be a force in the run game. **Grade: 8.7**

### Chad Greenway, LB

**Strengths:** Aggressive and has great explosiveness. Attacks the line and uses his hands well to shed blockers. A sideline-to-sideline player with great speed and quickness. Takes good angles and is a sure tackler. Has quickness and great instincts as a blitz. Makes plays in pursuit.

**Weaknesses:** Must improve his lower-body strength. Not effective in man coverage downfield. A knee injury cost him all of his rookie year.

**Bottom line:** Greenway has great physical tools and the instincts to be a top weakside linebacker. If he stays healthy, he'll develop into a bona fide playmaker. **Grade: 8.0**



### Ben Leber, LB

**Strengths:** Has a nice blend of size and speed. Tough, durable and in-tense; never stops working. Plays with good hand placement and pop on the strong side. Can shed blocks or jam tight ends and run with them downfield. Can take players head-on at the point of attack. Gets good depth on pass drops.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal playmaking skills and is out of his element in space; will dive and miss tackles.

**Bottom line:** Leber is a tough, blue-collar player who brings stability, if not great playmaking ability, to the defense. **Grade: 7.4**

### E.J. Henderson, LB

**Strengths:** Has good height and great bulk. Smooth and has fluid hips for his size. Has good feet and sideline-to-sideline potential; a powerful tackler. Can cover a lot of ground in zone coverage and match up in man-to-man.

**Weaknesses:** Has inconsistent technique and leverage. Slow sometimes to read and react. Takes too many false steps on fakes. Range and man-to-man skills are limited.

**Bottom line:** Henderson has the phys-

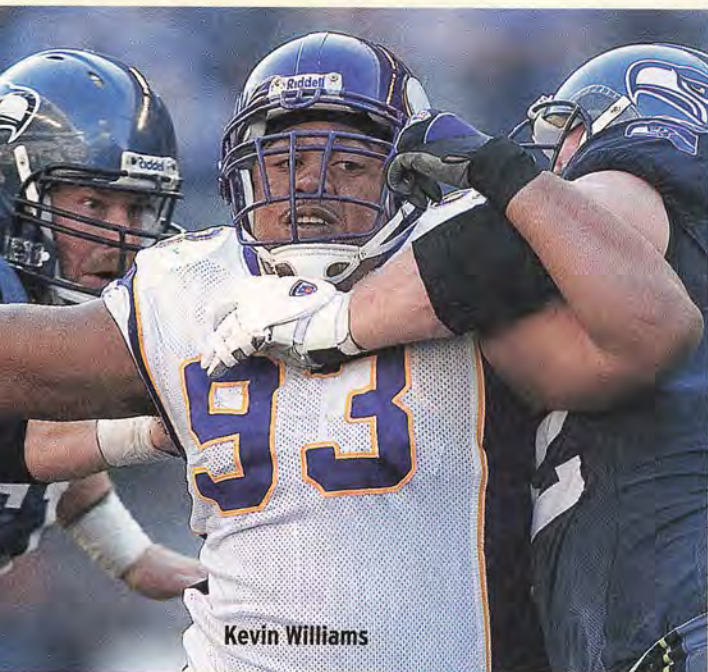


ical tools and toughness to be a long-term starter in the NFL. **Grade: 6.8**

### Antoine Winfield, CB

**Strengths:** Tough, strong and aggres-

**Bottom line:** Griffin is not a game-changer, but he's a solid presence on the perimeter. He's physical and versatile enough to play any position in the secondary. **Grade: 6.2**



Kevin Williams

TOM HAUCK FOR SN

sive. Has quick feet, smooth hips and very good speed. Can knock receivers off their routes in press coverage. Technically sound. Explodes out of his backpedal and shows great closing burst. Fills hard, takes great pursuit angles and tackles with surprising power. Forces fumbles.

**Weaknesses:** Has marginal height and lacks ideal bulk. Occasionally gets washed out at the point of attack by bigger blockers. Has some trouble matching up against big receivers in man-to-man. Can be overaggressive. **Bottom line:** He's one of the league's best run-support cornerbacks despite his size. **Grade: 7.6**

### ↑ Cedric Griffin, CB

**Strengths:** Plays physically. Aggressive in man coverage, solid in zone coverage. Uses his height and long arms to break up passes. Has the upper-body strength to overwhelm receivers at the line. Has a nice burst out of his backpedal and excellent tackling skills. Versatile; also can play safety. Has good instincts.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal speed and quickness. Can be too aggressive. Must improve ball skills.

### ↑ Darren Sharper, S

**Strengths:** Big, strong and versatile. Fills hard and shows tackling explosiveness. Reads plays quickly and gets good jumps. Can cover the deep third, match up with tight ends and play in the box. Has good height, leaping ability and ball skills. Shows good initial quickness and closing burst on the blitz. A leader.

**Weaknesses:** Has lost a step. Has some trouble taking on and shedding blocks. Takes poor angles.

**Bottom line:** Sharper is a ballhawk with good coverage skills. All he does is make plays. **Grade: 8.1**

### ↓ Dwight Smith, S

**Strengths:** Good in coverage with excellent speed. Plays the ball well and jams receivers in man-to-man. Has impressive strength, can push receivers around and is aggressive. Generally gets a good read.

**Weaknesses:** Slightly undersized and has some trouble in the open field. Must improve his technique when covering deep.

**Bottom line:** Smith probably is best suited for a backup role in a cover 2 scheme. **Grade: 5.9**

## KEY MOVES

### 2007 DRAFT PICKS

#### Rd.-Pick

GRADE **B**

#### 1-7 Adrian Peterson, RB, Oklahoma

Adds playmaking ability. May line up with Chester Taylor.

#### 2-44 Sidney Rice, WR, South Carolina

Lacks toughness. Might not be able to contribute right away.

#### 3-72 Marcus McCauley, CB, Fresno State

Must be more physical. A nickel back candidate.

#### 4-102 Brian Robison, DE, Texas

Could make an immediate impact as a pass rusher.

#### 5-146 Aundrae Allison, WR, East Carolin

Will compete with Mewelde Moore for the punt return job.

#### 6-176 Rufus Alexander, LB, Oklahoma

Can play on special teams right away. Adds depth on the weak side.

#### 7-217 Tyler Thigpen, QB, Coastal Carolina

Has a good chance to be the No. 3 quarterback.

#### 7-233 Chandler Williams, WR, Florida International

Punt return candidate could become a deep threat.

### VETERAN PLAYERS

**Additions:** LB Vinny Ciurciu (FA/Panthers), S Mike Doss (FA/Colts), TE Visanthe Shiancoe (FA/Giants), WR Bobby Wade (FA/Titans).

**Losses:** LB Napoleon Harris (FA/Chiefs), WR Bethel Johnson (WR/Eagles), QB Brad Johnson (FA/Cowboys), OT Mike Rosenthal (FA/Dolphins), CB Fred Smoot (FA/Redskins), OL Jason Whittle (FA/Bills), TE Jermaine Wiggins (FA/Jaguars).

can stay with running backs and tight ends in coverage, an essential requirement in the cover 2.

Dontarrious Thomas, who has never been able to hold down a starting job, probably will be top backup at each position. Thomas has the speed and hitting ability of an elite player, but he lacks instincts and has been slow to learn defenses. **GRADE: B-Secondary**—The poor ranking in pass defense doesn't reflect well on the secondary, but it's misleading for a couple of reasons: 1) Opponents have to throw because they can't run. 2) The poor pass rush forces the defensive backs to cover receivers for too long. No secondary can hold up forever.

Antoine Winfield and Griffin might be the most physical cornerback duo in the league. Winfield's tackling ability is well known, and last season he stepped up his coverage under former coordinator Mike Tomlin. Griffin hits so hard that he suffered nerve damage in his neck late last season. But his approach is perfect in a system that asks cornerbacks to play close to the line.

The departure of Fred Smoot leaves the team without a veteran nickel corner. Youngsters Charles Gordon and Dovonte Edwards and third-round pick Marcus McCauley will get an opportunity to fill that role, but the best option might come from the team's glut of safeties.

Free safety Darren Sharper is at his best in coverage—especially when he can read a quarterback's progression. Strong safety Dwight Smith, who is decent in coverage and strong in run support, will have to win a starting job. He could get pushed by Tank Williams, but only if Williams has recovered from a broken kneecap. Williams and Mike Doss, who is coming back from a torn ACL, are in the running for the nickel job. **GRADE: A-**



## SPECIAL TEAMS

Linebacker Vinny Ciurciu was lured away from Carolina to provide a relentless effort and be a role model for what have been weak coverage units. Coverage will be important because Ryan Longwell's kickoffs are on the short side, though he is one of the league's most accurate field goal men from inside 50 yards.

Long snapper Cullen Loeffler is among the best at his job, but the situation at punter is less clear. Chris Kluwe, who regularly boomed punts for distance and hang time before tearing his ACL two years ago, struggled last season. Kluwe also struggled at times as a holder, so that job could change hands.

## STADIUM/MEDIA

Hubert H. Humphrey Metrodome  
(63,720, artificial)

Tickets: 612-338-4537

Training camp: Minnesota State  
University-Mankato; 507-387-3335

Radio: KFAN-AM (1130); KTLK-FM  
(100.3)

Website: vikings.com

## BOTTOM LINE

The team doesn't look ready to make a significant jump from 6-10. It's hard to imagine the offense being effective without a tested quarterback or proven receivers. The defense will remain stout against the run, but there's no guarantee Frazier's blitz packages will help the team defend the pass better. And questions remain about the relationship between players and coaches—especially after the departure of Tomlin, the popular defensive coordinator. This, indeed, appears to be a rebuilding year—and a time for extraordinary patience. **SN**

Kevin Seifert covers the Vikings for the Minneapolis Star Tribune.

## PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

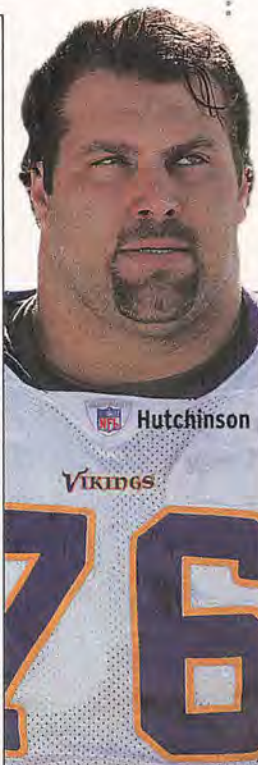
OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
QB	□ Tarvaris Jackson	LE	● Keneshi Udeze
	□ Brooks Bollinger		● Erasmus James
FB	● Tony Richardson	DT	▲ Kevin Williams
	● Jeff Dugan		□ Spencer Johnson
RB	■ Chester Taylor	DT	▲ Pat Williams
	■ Adrian Peterson		□ Spencer Johnson
WR	● Bobby Wade	RE	■ Darrien Scott
	● Troy Williamson		● Ray Edwards
WR	● Billy McMullen	SLB	■ Ben Leber
	● Sidney Rice		● Dontarrious Thomas
TE	■ Visanthe Shiancoe	MLB	● E.J. Henderson
	● Jim Kleinsasser		● Dontarrious Thomas
LT	▲ Bryant McKinnie	WLB	● Chad Greenway
	● Artis Hicks		● Dontarrious Thomas
LG	▲ Steve Hutchinson	LCB	▲ Antoine Winfield
	□ Anthony Herrera		□ Dovonte Edwards
C	■ Matt Birk	SS	■ Dwight Smith
	□ Anthony Herrera		● Tank Williams
RG	● Artis Hicks	FS	■ Darren Sharper
	□ Anthony Herrera		● Mike Doss
RT	● Ryan Cook	RCB	■ Cedric Griffin
	● Marcus Johnson		● Marcus McCauley

## SPECIALISTS

K	■ Ryan Longwell	KR	● Bobby Wade
P	● Chris Kluwe	PR	■ Mewelde Moore
		LS	▲ Cullen Loeffler

▲ Elite ■ Solid ● Adequate □ Fringe

Depth charts updated weekly at [sportingnews.com](http://sportingnews.com)



## VIKINGS ROSTER

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL exp.	College	How acq.	2006 GP/GS
QUARTERBACKS							
9	Brooks Bollinger	6-1/205	11/15/79	5	Wisconsin	T-NYJ/06	2/0
2	Drew Henson	6-4/233	2/13/80	4	Michigan	FA/07	0/0
7	Tarvaris Jackson	6-1/232	4/21/83	2	Alabama State	D2c/06	4/2
16	Tyler Thigpen	6-1/216	4/14/84	R	Coastal Carolina	D7a/07	—
RUNNING BACKS							
35	Ciaticrick Fason	6-0/209	10/29/82	3	Florida	D4/05	5/0
30	Mewelde Moore	5-11/209	7/24/82	4	Tulane	D4/04	16/0
45	Richard Owens (FB)	6-4/273	11/4/80	4	Louisville	FA/04	16/2
28	Adrian Peterson	6-1/217	3/21/85	R	Oklahoma	D1/07	—
22	Artose Pinner	5-10/235	1/5/78	5	Kentucky	FA/06	12/1
49	Tony Richardson	6-1/238	12/17/71	13	Auburn	FA/06	9/7
38	Naufahu Tahi (FB)	6-0/254	10/30/81	1	BYU	FA/06	0/0
29	Chester Taylor	5-11/213	9/22/79	6	Toledo	FA/06	15/15
RECEIVERS							
14	Aundrea Allison	6-0/198	4/29/86	R	East Carolina	D5/07	—
11	Jason Carter	6-0/205	9/15/82	2	Texas A&M	FA/06	1/0
83	Jeff Dugan (TE)	6-4/258	4/8/81	4	Maryland	D7/04	7/7
16	Cortez Hankton	6-0/200	1/20/81	5	Texas Southern	FA/07	12/1
85	Randy Hymes	6-3/211	8/7/79	6	Grambling	FA/07	0/0
40	Jim Kleinsasser (TE)	6-3/272	1/31/77	9	North Dakota	D2/99	16/12
17	Maurice Mann	6-1/190	9/14/82	4	Nevada	FA/06	1/0
12	Billy McMullen	6-4/210	3/8/80	5	Virginia	T-Phi/06	16/0
15	Martin Nance	6-3/212	5/26/83	2	Miami (Ohio)	FA/06	1/1
18	Sidney Rice	6-3/200	9/1/86	R	South Carolina	D2/07	—
81	Visanthe Shiancoe (TE)	6-4/250	6/18/80	5	Morgan State	FA/07	16/4
19	Bobby Wade	5-10/192	2/25/81	5	Arizona	FA/07	16/2
89	Chandler Williams	5-10/184	8/9/85	R	Florida Int'l	D7b/07	—
82	Troy Williamson	6-1/203	4/30/83	3	South Carolina	D1a/05	14/11
OFFENSIVE LINEMEN							
78	Matt Birk (C)	6-4/309	7/23/76	10	Harvard	D6/98	16/16
62	Ryan Cook (C)	6-6/328	5/8/83	2	New Mexico	D2b/06	6/3
64	Anthony Herrera (G)	6-2/315	6/14/80	4	Tennessee	FA/04	2/0
79	Artis Hicks (G)	6-4/335	11/28/78	5	Memphis	T-Phi/06	14/14
76	Steve Hutchinson (G)	6-5/313	11/1/77	7	Michigan	FA/06	16/16
72	Marcus Johnson (T)	6-6/321	12/1/81	3	Mississippi	D2/05	10/10
66	Norm Katnik (C)	6-4/280	7/2/81	3	USC	FA/07	3/2
46	Cullen Loeffler (LS)	6-5/241	1/27/81	4	Texas	FA/03	16/0
73	Jimmy Martin (G)	6-5/306	10/19/82	2	Virginia Tech	FA/06	0/0
74	Bryant McKinnie (T)	6-8/343	9/23/79	6	Miami	D1/02	16/16
DEFENSIVE LINEMEN							
91	Ray Edwards (E)	6-4/268	1/1/85	2	Purdue	D4/06	15/2
99	Erasmus James (E)	6-4/266	11/4/82	3	Wisconsin	D1b/05	2/2
97	Spencer Johnson (T)	6-3/286	12/12/81	4	Auburn	FA/04	14/0
96	Ross Kolodziej (T)	6-3/292	5/11/78	7	Wisconsin	FA/06	12/0
92	Jayme Mitchell (E)	6-6/285	3/15/84	2	Mississippi	FA/06	13/0
96	Brian Robison (E)	6-3/267	4/28/83	R	Texas	D4/07	—
98	Darrien Scott (E)	6-3/289	10/25/81	4	Ohio State	D3/04	16/13
90	Khreeem Smith (E)	6-4/270	7/7/79	2	Oklahoma State	FA/06	1/0
95	Keneshi Udeze (E)	6-3/281	3/5/83	4	USC	D1/04	16/15
93	Kevin Williams (T)	6-5/304	8/16/80	5	Oklahoma State	D1/03	16/16
94	Pat Williams (T)	6-3/317	10/24/72	10	Texas A&M	FA/05	16/16
LINEBACKERS							
57	Rufus Alexander	6-1/228	4/12/83	R	Oklahoma	D6/07	—
54	Vinny Ciurciu	6-0/235	5/2/80	5	Boston College	FA/07	16/0
59	Heath Farwell	6-0/235	12/31/81	3	San Diego State	FA/05	16/0
55	Jason Glenn	6-0/231	8/20/79	7	Texas A&M	FA/06	9/0
52	Chad Greenway	6-2/242	1/13/83	2	Iowa	D1/06	0/0
56	E.J. Henderson	6-1/245	8/3/80	5	Maryland	D2/03	16/16
51	Ben Leber	6-3/255	12/7/78	6	Kansas State	FA/06	15/10
54	Dontarrious Thomas	6-2/241	9/2/80	4	Auburn	D2/04	16/3
DEFENSIVE BACKS							
20	Greg Blue (S)	6-2/216	3/12/82	2	Georgia	D5/06	16/2
28	Patrick Body (CB)	6-2/198	1/17/82	3	Toledo	FA/06	0/0
21	Mike Doss (S)	5-10/207	3/24/81	5	Ohio State	FA/07	6/4
36	Dovonte Edwards (CB)	6-0/182	10/17/82	3	N.C. State	FA/05	0/0
41	Charles Gordon (CB)	5-11/180	7/18/84	2	Kansas	FA/06	8/1
23	Cedric Griffin (CB)	6-0/199	11/1/82	2	Texas	D2a/06	14/7
37	Mike Hawkins (CB)	6-2/178	7/15/83	3	Oklahoma	W-Cle/06	7/0
31	Will Hunter (CB)	5-10/190	3/24/79	3	Syracuse	FA/04	10/0
44	Andre Maddox (S)	6-1/200	10/8/82	2	N.C. State	FA/07	0/0
31	Marcus McCauley (CB)	6-0/203	9/3/83	R	Fresno State	D3/07	—
42	Darren Sharper (S)	6-2/210	11/3/75	11	William & Mary	FA/05	16/16
24	Dwight Smith (S)	5-10/201	8/13/78	7	Akron	FA/06	15/14
27	Romeyl Whitaker (CB)	5-9/196	3/19/79	5	Virginia Tech	FA/06	16/2
25	Tank Williams (S)	6-3/223	6/30/80	6	Stanford	FA/06	0/0
26	Antoine Winfield (CB)	5-9/180	6/24/77	9	Ohio State	FA/04	16/16
SPECIALISTS							
5	Chris Kluwe (P)	6-4/215	12/24/81	3	UCLA	W-Sea/05	16/0
8	Ryan Longwell (K)	6-0/202	8/16/74	11	California	FA/06	16/0

Abbreviations: D1-draft pick, first round; W-claimed on waivers; T-obtained in trade; FA-free-agent acquisition.



# SAINTS

**With a dazzling offense and a hot coach leading the way, this feel-good story appears far from over**

**SN PICK** 1st, NFC South (12-4)

BY MIKE TRIPLETT

**T**he Saints transformed themselves from a three-win team to one that reached the NFC championship game for the first time in the franchise's 40-year history—and in the first season after returning to New Orleans after a year without a home. This could be the year to write the fairy-tale ending.

After all, expectations never have been higher in the Big Easy. The roster is built for a sustained run; receiver Joe Horn is the only starter missing from the NFC South championship team, and coach Sean Payton, quarterback Drew Brees, running back Reggie Bush and wide receiver Marques Colston are heading into just their second seasons with the Saints.

The schedule, which includes trips to Indianapolis and Chicago, likely will be a little tougher, but the Saints figure to be better, too. Lofty expectations and the glare from a brighter national spotlight are things the Saints are going to have to get used to.

## OFFENSE

The Saints ranked No. 1 in the NFL in total offense last season, and this unit is as versatile as it is explosive. Payton calls his own plays and has one of the league's most creative offensive minds. Brees immediately took to Payton's version of the West Coast system and was aided by a wealth of weapons. Deuce McAllister is a workhorse runner. The electric Bush is a threat as a runner and receiver. Colston is a big, physical receiver who piled up numbers after being a draft-day afterthought as a seventh-rounder out of Hostra. Payton loves to run misdirection and play-action—often with Bush and McAllister both on the field. Opposing defenses

## SCHEDULE

All times Eastern

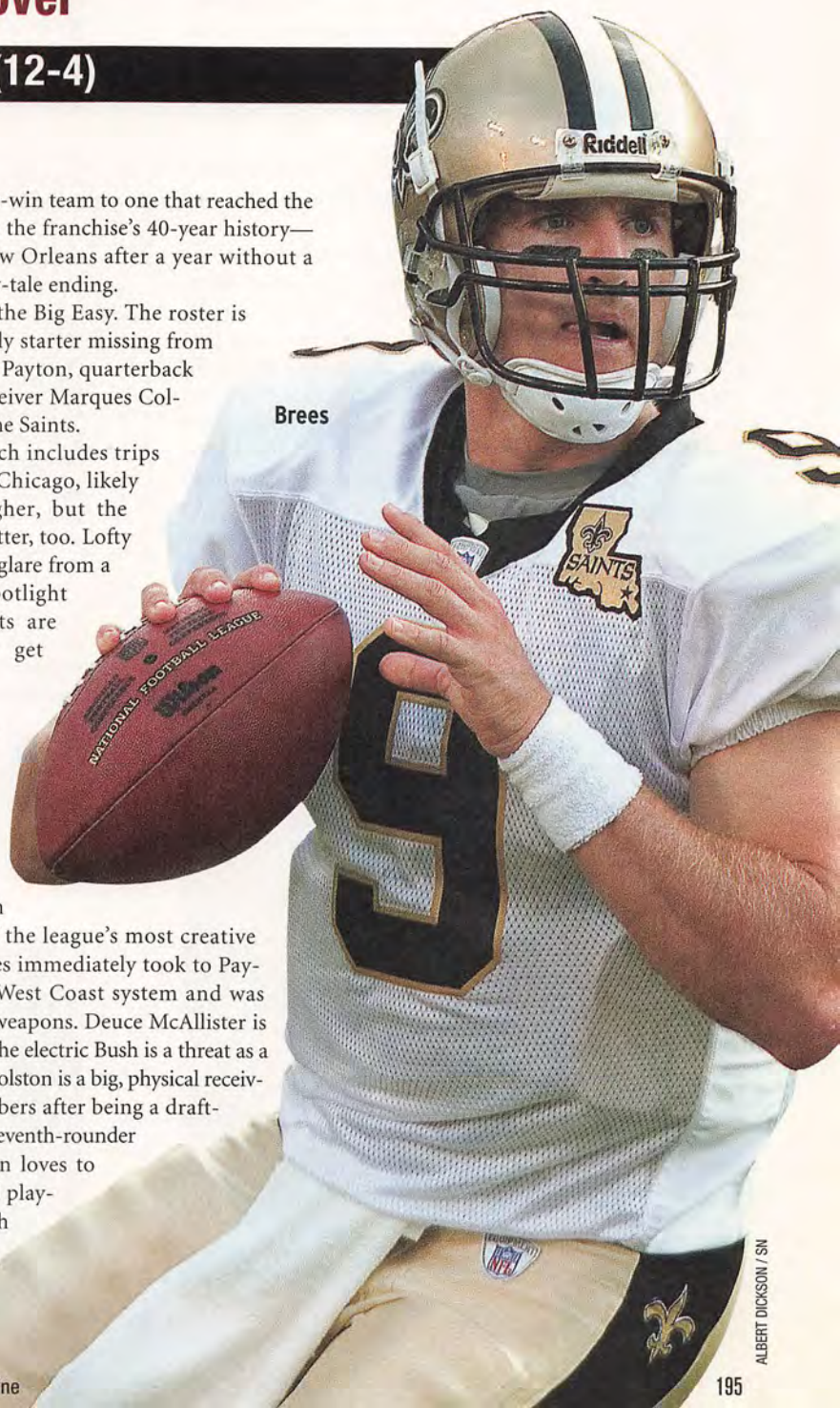
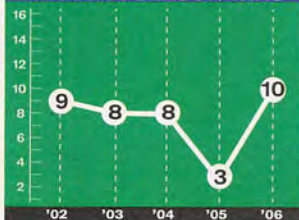
Sept. 6	at Indianapolis†	8:30
Sept. 16	at Tampa Bay	1:00
Sept. 24	TENNESSEE*	8:30
Sept. 30	Open date	
Oct. 7	CAROLINA	1:00
Oct. 14	at Seattle	8:15
Oct. 21	ATLANTA	1:00
Oct. 28	at San Francisco	4:15
Nov. 4	JACKSONVILLE	1:00
Nov. 11	ST. LOUIS	1:00
Nov. 18	at Houston	1:00
Nov. 25	at Carolina	1:00
Dec. 2	TAMPA BAY	1:00
Dec. 10	at Atlanta*	8:30
Dec. 16	ARIZONA	1:00
Dec. 23	PHILADELPHIA	1:00
Dec. 30	at Chicago	1:00

Strength of schedule: 25th

\*Monday †Thursday

Analysis of every Saints game:  
[sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom](http://sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom)

## REGULAR-SEASON WINS



had a hard time keeping up with this unit in 2006.

**Quarterbacks**—As the Saints returned to New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, Brees embraced the rebuilding community, became the new face of the team and cherished the role of locker room leader. Oh, and he was fantastic on the field. The smart, accurate quarterback silenced any doubts about his surgically repaired shoulder by throwing for a league-high 4,418 yards to go with 26 touchdowns and just 11 interceptions. If anything, his arm looked stronger, as he regularly threw the deep ball effectively and connected on underneath routes. At 28, Brees is in his prime.

Jamie Martin, who played in one game last season, is a career backup who is smart and accurate and can move a little in the pocket. He has the trust of Payton, but it's unclear whether Martin could keep the offense at a reasonably high level if Brees were to miss significant time.

Tyler Palko, an undrafted rookie, will battle Jason Fife for the right to become Payton's developmental project at quarterback. **GRADE: A**

**Running backs**—The two-back system is all the rage in the NFL—and the Saints have an elite combo in McAllister and Bush.

McAllister, an every-down bulldozer before he injured his knee in 2005, still can take over games. That was evident when he ran for 143 yards in the playoff victory over the Eagles. Bush made his biggest impact in December and January after a nagging ankle injury slowed him early. He scored nine touchdowns in the final seven games, including the playoffs, and caught a team-high 88 passes. Payton likes to keep defenses off-balance by using Bush on draws, perimeter runs and end-arounds, but Bush needs to reduce his negative plays.

The Saints even sneak in the occasional play to fullback Mike Karney, who is one of the league's best young blockers.

Reserve running backs Aaron Stecker and Jamaal Branch combined for just 14 carries last season. Stecker is a longtime kick returner who has some wiggle in the open field. Branch can move a pile with his 230 pounds. **GRADE: A**

## SCOUTING REPORTS: OFFENSE

### ↑ Drew Brees, QB

**Strengths:** Accurate, with nice touch. Has great mechanics. The ball does not spend a lot of time in Brees' hand. Exceptional on short throws. Throws catchable balls. Looks through his progressions and will find the open receiver. Shifty enough in the pocket to avoid the rush.

**Weaknesses:** Has to play in the right system to make up for his lack of arm strength. Can't create when his feet are not set. Accuracy dips when outside the pocket.

**Bottom line:** Brees' career was on the line in 2006, and he answered in a big way. He leads one of the most productive offenses in the league.

**Grade: 8.7**

### ↑ Reggie Bush, RB

**Strengths:** Has great body control, quickness, elite speed and superior vision. A home run threat every time he touches the ball. Elusive and will bounce outside or hit the cutback lane as soon as he reaches the second level. Nearly impossible to tackle in the open field. The best receiver among running backs. Gets open quickly, catches passes at full speed and is a dangerous runner after the catch. Can line up outside or in the slot, is capable of running any route and can catch passes over his shoulder. Also a dangerous return man.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks the bulk to move the pile and wears down. Does not

have a lot of experience as a blocker and needs to improve his technique.

**Bottom line:** Bush had a strong rookie season and answered critics who thought his lack of bulk would be a problem. He is a multiple threat. If the Saints use him properly, as they did last year, he will be one of the most productive and exciting players in the NFL. **Grade: 8.9**

### ↑ Deuce McAllister, RB

**Strengths:** A powerful runner between the tackles. Runs hard, keeps legs churning and rarely loses yards. Has enough speed to go the distance. Solid in pass protection and a deceptive receiver out of the backfield.

**Weaknesses:** Has upright running style that exposes him to unnecessary hits. Should do a better job of breaking tackles and has average vision and burst.

**Bottom line:** McAllister is another Saint who beat the naysayers with a strong performance coming off injury. He is a powerful, physical runner and a viable threat near the goal line. His platoon with Bush will keep him fresh and productive. **Grade: 7.9**

### ↑ Marques Colston, WR

**Strengths:** Has excellent size. A long strider who makes big plays. Has good hands and catches passes at full speed. Adjusts well to the ball in the air. Shows good leaping ability and makes plays even when surrounded

## FANTASY SOURCE PICKS

### STUD

QB Drew Brees

### NO. 1 POTENTIAL

RB Reggie Bush

### ON THE RISE

WR Marques Colston

### INJURY RISK

RB Deuce McAllister

### TOP IDP THREAT

DE Will Smith



ALBERT DICKSON / SN

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JAY DROVINS / SN

Players are graded by War Room scouts on a 1-10 scale.

\*Rookies (not graded)

by defenders.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks elite speed to consistently get open downfield. Must improve his quickness in and out of breaks. Sometimes will struggle to gain separation.

**Bottom line:** Colston not only earned a starting job last year but was a legitimate rookie of the year candidate. His size creates mismatches, and his sure hands and route-running skills make him dangerous. **Grade: 7.6**

### Devery Henderson, WR

**Strengths:** Has good size. Gets great burst off the line and can blow past defenders. Creates separation with short-area burst. Has good strength, can block downfield and is not shy about making contact.

**Weaknesses:** Still raw. Not skilled at breaking press coverage. Suffers concentration lapses and has inconsistent hands.

**Bottom line:** Henderson has the physical tools to develop into a solid starter but must improve his focus. **Grade: 6.5**

### \*Robert Meachem, WR

**Strengths:** Has good size, with an explosive burst off the line. Is adept at catching passes in stride, which leads to big plays. Makes tacklers miss in the open field. Versatile enough to line up anywhere.

**Weaknesses:** Must improve his concentration; drops too many passes because of lack of focus. Must get tougher, especially over the middle. Not a good blocker and struggles to escape jams.

**Bottom line:** If Meachem lives up to his potential, he'll line up alongside Colston as a rookie and fill the void in the offense left by Joe Horn's departure.

### ↑ Jammal Brown, T

**Strengths:** Outstanding athlete. Uses sound technique. Rarely gets beat off the line. Shows good balance and moves well laterally. Has the quickness to mirror top edge rushers.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to improve his lower-body strength. Must make better use of his hands.

**Bottom line:** Brown showed his athleticism and versatility by moving to left tackle in 2006 and anchoring a line that gave up the fewest sacks in the league. He is a young stud. **Grade: 7.7**

### Jon Stinchcomb, T

**Strengths:** Has great size. A good technician. Maintains good balance. Has a quick first step, can slide with defenders and doesn't get beaten by speed rushers.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks strength and muscle tone. Coming off a knee injury and needs to improve lower-body strength. Plays soft at times.

**Bottom line:** Stinchcomb is a solid starter with excellent mechanics. **Grade: 6.8**

### ↑ Jahri Evans, G

**Strengths:** Has ideal size, a large wingspan and a wide body. Also can play tackle. Has great lower-body power. An overwhelming run blocker at the point of attack. Holds ground against the strongest bull rushers.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks upper-body strength. Lacks mobility; struggles to reach linebackers and safeties.

**Bottom line:** Evans did an outstanding job as a rookie from a small school. He dominated as a run blocker and answered the bell against every pass rusher he faced. A future star. **Grade: 7.0**

### Jamar Nesbit, G

**Strengths:** Can engulf smaller defenders. Better run blocker than pass blocker. Can lock on to defenders with hands.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks quickness and athleticism. Vulnerable to speed rushers. Has difficulty picking up stunts and blitzes.

**Bottom line:** Nesbit can play all five positions on the line. He is a solid all-around player who is at his best in close quarters inside. **Grade: 6.2**

### ↓ Jeff Faine, C

**Strengths:** Quick and smart and can make all the line calls. Provides solid help in pass protection and has good awareness for stunts and delayed blitzes. Does a solid job against double moves and uses his hands well.

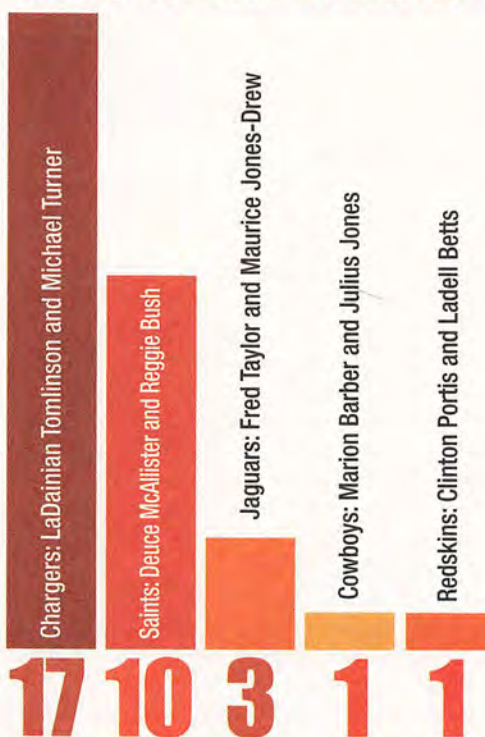
**Weaknesses:** Not overly aggressive and lacks a mean streak. Gets knocked back too often and lacks versatility. Not explosive and lacks strength.

**Bottom line:** Faine is a solid player who uses leverage well to make his blocks. **Grade: 6.9**

**KEY:** ↑ Ascending ↓ Descending

## INSIDERS POLL

Who has the best RB duo in the NFL?



Based on a poll of SN's 32 team correspondents

## BOLD PREDICTIONS

- 1 RB Reggie Bush will make the first of many trips to Hawaii in February. He can score from anywhere on the field and was just starting to find his groove in December and January.
- 2 DE Charles Grant will join him. Now that he has worked out a lucrative contract extension, he will break into the upper echelon of NFL pass rushers in his sixth season.
- 3 The young receivers will experience growing pains. They struggled with some drops and fumbles in 2006, and now they won't be able to benefit from the presence of Joe Horn.

**Receivers**—With Horn gone, Colston clearly is the No. 1 target, and it will be intriguing to see how he responds. His best assets are his hands and his size (6-4, 231), which he uses to shield defenders, and he makes plays in traffic.

The Saints helped take some pressure off Colston by drafting Robert Meachem in the first round. Like Colston, Meachem has a terrific combination of size (6-2, 214) and speed, and he will provide even more of a deep threat.

Meachem will have to battle David Patten and returning backup Terrance Copper for the No. 2 receiver job. Copper emerged as a reliable possession receiver, and Patten, despite his struggles the past two seasons, runs good routes and could be reliable out of the slot.

The No. 3 role likely will belong to Devery Henderson, a downfield threat who averaged 23.3 yards per catch in 2006.

The team's young receivers all need to sharpen their concentration, though, to cut down on dropped passes or fumbles.

With the addition of Eric Johnson, the tight end figures to be a bigger part of the passing attack. Johnson is more of a pure receiver than any tight end the team had last season. His biggest problem has been staying healthy. Mark Campbell is a solid blocker and a decent checkdown option. Billy Miller is a former starter in the league and can contribute from time to time. **GRADE: A-**

**Line**—The biggest surprise of a surprising campaign was how well the line jelled with new starters at all five positions. This year, all five starters are back.

After switching from the right to left tackle, Jammal Brown made some mistakes but also proved he's a cornerstone player. He has the athleticism and quickness to block elite speed rushers and gets a consistent push as a run blocker. Brown needs to commit fewer penalties, but considering he's entering only his third year, he likely will get better.

Left guard Jamar Nesbit has good strength and takes solid angles on his blocks. Center Jeff Faine was something of a disappointment in Cleveland, but he emerged as the leader of the line after arriving in a trade. He knows how to use leverage, and he is tough and athletic.

Right guard Jahri Evans was another rookie surprise. Expected to be a project who needed extensive work on his pass blocking, Evans instead won a job in training camp. He's still learning the nuances of the position, but he plays with good balance and quickness. Right tackle Jon Stinchcomb is a decent enough athlete, which is key because the Saints ask their linemen to get out in space and reverse fields. Stinchcomb is solid as a run and pass blocker.

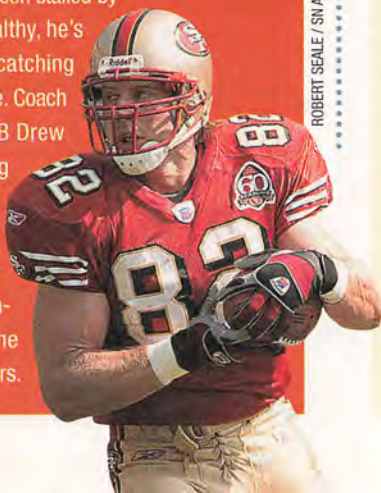
Jonathan Goodwin can play guard or center, and he has starting experience. Zach Strief, another 2006 draft pick, has a massive frame (6-7, 349) and could develop into a future starter at tackle, though he probably lacks the athleticism to play on the left side. Rob Pettitt struggled in pass protection with the Cowboys, but he might have found his niche last year as a backup tackle with the Saints.

The team added two developmental projects in the middle of this year's draft, selecting guard Andy Alleman and tackle Jermon Bushrod. **GRADE: B+**

## SECRET WEAPON

### ERIC JOHNSON, TE

Johnson's career has been stalled by injuries, but when healthy, he's one of the best pass-catching tight ends in the league. Coach Sean Payton and QB Drew Brees have loved using tight ends with previous teams, and Johnson can hurt defenses that pay too much attention to stopping the Saints' other playmakers.



ROBERT SEALE / SN ARCHIVES

## SCOUTING REPORTS: DEFENSE

### ↑ Will Smith, E

**Strengths:** Has good quickness and upper-body strength. Extends his arms and uses his hands well. Gets good leverage. Can be explosive and will bait offensive linemen with a nice change-of-pace move. Changes directions well and can accelerate to finish plays. Can shed blockers, then make the tackle.

**Weaknesses:** Still learning the position and doesn't always show good awareness. Inconsistent at reading and reacting to the run. Must play with better discipline.

**Bottom line:** Smith has taken the next step and become a dominant force.

**Grade: 8.0**

### Charles Grant, E

**Strengths:** Has very good size and can be explosive. Shows great quickness and acceleration. Has good change-of-direction skills and is a powerful tackler. Fairly tenacious in pursuit and makes tackles downfield. Constricts the pockets with speed and quickness.

**Weaknesses:** Plays too high and gets poor leverage. Must improve his hand work in disengaging from blockers. Not great at diagnosing the run. Needs to improve his pass-rush technique and get stronger.

**Bottom line:** Grant's size and explosiveness make him a good complement to Smith. **Grade: 7.3**

### ↑ Brian Young, T

**Strengths:** Excels playing a one-gap style. Has great anticipation and quickness and shows good burst off the ball. Uses his hands well to get separation and has very good upper-body strength. Excels in space in the running game and is relentless tracking down plays. Has excellent agility and good ability on line stunts.

**Weaknesses:** Undersized and can be knocked off the ball. Struggles against double-teams. Plays high and must improve his pass-rush moves.

**Bottom line:** Young lacks ideal size to play inside but makes up for it with his explosiveness and high energy.

**Grade: 7.2**

### ↓ Hollis Thomas, T

**Strengths:** A powerful inside player who uses his leverage well. Has excellent lower-body strength and explosiveness. Can play one- and two-

gap techniques effectively. Has good body control and can split double-teams. A short-area battler who has decent lateral ability and change-of-direction skill.

**Weaknesses:** Has health and durability issues. Must maintain his conditioning. Tends to get sluggish later in games.

**Bottom line:** Thomas is very strong and can be a dominant run defender, even after 10-plus years in the league. Last year, he added some pop to the Saints' pass rush from the interior. He's a power player who still has a couple of good years left in him.

**Grade: 6.3**

### Scott Fujita, LB

**Strengths:** Has good speed and uses his length well when lined up over the tight end. A productive tackler who finds a way to get to the ball. Can make plays sideline-to-sideline.

**Weaknesses:** Plays a little stiff and can be beaten in space. Not real strong.

**Bottom line:** Fujita is a good starter as a strongside linebacker. He does not look pretty but is around the football quite a bit. **Grade: 7.0**

### ↓ Brian Simmons, LB

**Strengths:** A versatile every-down player with a solid motor. Displays sideline-to-sideline speed. Makes many tackles outside the box. Has excellent athletic ability to play through traffic. Has good instincts and is consistently around the ball. Solid in coverage.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to be more aggressive attacking the hole. Not very physical and gets out of position by running around blocks. Does not produce enough explosive plays.

**Bottom line:** Simmons is a smooth, fluid athlete but has never become a dominant player. He remains a consummate professional. **Grade: 7.0**

### Scott Shanley, LB

**Strengths:** Reads plays quickly and can beat blockers to the point of attack. Has great instincts as a run defender but lacks lateral mobility. Uncomfortable dropping into zone coverage.

**Weaknesses:** Can be overaggressive and lacks a second gear to recover once out of position. Lacks ideal bulk; offensive linemen can engulf him.

## SCOUT TAKES

## A scout from another team sizes up the Saints

**Drew Brees** is a real quick decision maker. A lot of quarterbacks will take their drops and on their last step they'll kind of look around and then get rid of the ball. He seems to know where he wants to go with it when he hits that final step. ... **Reggie Bush** is a great receiver, and you can do a lot of creative things with him that cause teams a lot of problems. But in my mind, he still hasn't proved he can truly run between the tackles. Do I think he can do it? Sure, once he learns to hit the hole quicker and quits trying to make a big play on every snap. ... **Charles Grant** and **Will Smith** are one of the top defensive end tandems in the league. ... **Olindo Mare** will definitely help them with field position. He's got a great leg—and kicking in a dome, he'll only get better. His field goal accuracy has started to dwindle some, but I think he's an upgrade for them.



BOB LEVERONE / SN

## DEFENSE

The Saints had a bend-but-don't-break defense in 2006 that made huge fourth quarter stands in some of the biggest games. But New Orleans ranked 31st in the league with just 19 takeaways and didn't force any in two playoff games. Every starter returns, but coordinator Gary Gibbs is hoping three free-agent pickups—middle linebacker Brian Simmons, cornerback Jason David and safety Kevin Kaesviharn—compete for starting jobs. Ends Will Smith and Charles Grant are the two standout playmakers on this traditional 4-3 defense that relies on a lot of man coverage. The secondary needs to allow fewer big plays while forcing more interceptions.

**Line**—Smith earned his first Pro Bowl last season after producing 10½ sacks—and it won't be his last. He has the strength and speed to overwhelm linemen as a pass rusher.

Grant is every bit the pass rusher Smith is. Grant has surprising agility for his size (6-3, 290) and does a good job of penetrating the backfield to get sacks, hurry passes and force fumbles.

Second-year end Rob Ninkovich needs to earn his spot as the top backup after recovering from a knee injury. He is a pass-rushing specialist who needs to develop as a run stopper.

Hollis Thomas and Brian Young are solid at tackle but no more than that. They are asked to tie up blockers so the linebackers can make plays. Like most teams, the Saints use a busy rotation to keep the big guys fresh, and Gibbs inserts Antwan Lake, Rodney Leisle and Willie Whitehead to spell Thomas and Young. Each is a serviceable veteran with decent enough athleticism. Whitehead also can play end.

**GRADE: B**

**Linebackers**—Last season, the Saints finally found a linebacker combination that worked after signing Scott Fujita to



ALBERT DICKSON / SN

Smith

**Bottom line:** Shanle plays hard and is a willing hitter. **Grade: 6.5**

**Mike McKenzie, CB**

**Strengths:** Can run with almost any receiver and has a second gear when the ball is in the air. Shows excellent body control and good change-of-direction skills. Has long arms, a good upper body and nice ball skills. Uses his hands well and is fairly physical ridding himself of blockers. Excels at trailing receivers underneath.

**Weaknesses:** Has inconsistent press technique and gives up the inside too often. Despite good tools, not a consistent tackler. Doesn't always give full effort when the play is away from him.

**Bottom line:** McKenzie brings experience and good tools to the table but lacks the big-play ability that would place him among the elite defensive backs. **Grade: 7.8**

**Jason David, CB**

**Strengths:** Athletic and physical, with good ball skills and body control. Has excellent foot quickness. Shows great feel and awareness. Effective in off coverage.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks great height, and is not a great leaper. Doesn't consistently shed wide receiver blocks in the running game.

**Bottom line:** David is limited physically, but his aggressive style of play, football intelligence and speed will make him an asset in the Saints' secondary. **Grade: 7.0**

**↑ Josh Bullocks, S**

**Strengths:** Has the range, athletic ability and recognition skills to be effective in deep coverage. Solid at changing directions and has speed to recover from mistakes.

**Weaknesses:** Must get stronger and be more effective against the run.

**Bottom line:** He has played a lot in his first two years in the league, and that experience will be invaluable to him. A very good young prospect with a big upside. **Grade: 7.0**

**Kevin Kaesviharn, S**

**Strengths:** A tough, versatile, competitive overachiever. Has excellent instincts and is able to read routes. A good special teams player.

**Weaknesses:** Not a top athlete. A liability in the box on early downs because of a lack of size and bulk. An average tackler because of his frame. Can be run over by bigger backs.

**Bottom line:** Kaesviharn is a decent starter who relies on intelligence, feel and instincts to compensate for his lack of speed and range. **Grade: 7.0**

play on the strong side and making summer trades for Scott Shanle (weak side) and Mark Simoneau (middle).

All three are blue-collar guys who make up for marginal athleticism by being in the right position, playing with high energy and tackling consistently. Fujita, in particular, is a leader who has a knack for making big plays in big moments.

Simmons, a nine-year veteran, is a fluid athlete who has a tendency to run around blocks, which takes him out of position. He doesn't make many huge plays but is sound. If Simmons can win the middle job, Simoneau would become the top backup inside and also play some outside. Alfred Fincher is a bit undersized, but he'll stick his nose into a pile and provides depth both inside and outside.

The Saints don't do a lot of blitzing with their linebackers, who are asked to simply stop the run and drop into coverage. **GRADE: B-**

**Secondary**—The last line of defense needs to be better. To that end, the Saints added Kaesviharn and David and drafted two corners to try to shore up their most inconsistent unit.

Mike McKenzie and Fred Thomas, last year's starting corners, are capable athletes who still have the speed and the attitude to play heavy doses of man coverage. But both have been inconsistent the past two years and have allowed too many deep completions against high-powered offenses.

McKenzie, in particular, has the tools to take a big step forward. He has been a big-time playmaker before and at 31 still should have a couple of good years left in him. Thomas is coming off a rough postseason, and David is expected to replace him as the starter. Though David, 25, doesn't have ideal size (5-8, 180), he is physical and his speed will be a welcome addition to the secondary.

Thomas will figure into the mix at nickel back, but the team also has other options there. Jason Craft can be a good cover guy and has good speed, but he can get caught out of position. Rookies Usama Young and David Jones both are speedy players with nice potential.

Improved play from the safety position would help the defense. Kaesviharn is a steady defender with a knack for finding the ball; he had a career-high six interceptions last year. Josh Bullocks is a great athlete with top-end

speed, and he likely will be better in his second year in Gibbs' system. Roman Harper showed promise as a heady rookie last year before suffering a season-ending knee injury in Week 5. **GRADE: C**

## SPECIAL TEAMS

The Saints made a surprising switch at kicker by acquiring Olindo Mare from Miami for a sixth-round pick and cutting John Carney, a reliable kicker who lacked leg strength on kickoffs. Mare has a powerful leg and has the most touchbacks in the NFL over the past eight years. He missed a career-high 10 field goal attempts last season, but he finished strong and likely will be more consistent now that he'll be kicking half of the time in a dome.

The team signed former Jaguars punter Chris Hanson, and he will compete against second-year pro Steve Weatherford. Hanson, who made the Pro Bowl in 2002, struggled last year because of nagging leg and hamstring issues. Weatherford showed some promise as a rookie but needs to iron out some inconsistencies.

Michael Lewis is a dangerous kickoff returner, and Bush is one of the league's most dangerous punt returners. The big question is: How much will the Saints use him on special teams? **GRADE: B+**

## BOTTOM LINE

Look for this team to be improved across the board. Brees and McAllister will be another year removed from their surgeries, the offensive line will benefit from a year of growth, and the defense added depth in back seven and will have a better handle on the schemes in Year 2 of Gibbs' system. Look for Bush to have a true breakout season—and if he does, the offense figures to be as exciting as any in the NFL.

But none of that guarantees a return trip to the NFC championship game. To get back there, the Saints will need to stay healthy again and navigate through what could be a much-improved NFC South. It won't be easy, but the Saints are the best bet in the NFC to reach the Super Bowl and an even better bet to be entertaining. **SN**

*Mike Triplett covers the Saints for the New Orleans Times-Picayune.*

## KEY MOVES

### 2007 DRAFT PICKS

#### Rd.-Pick

**GRADE B**

**1-27 Robert Meachem, WR, Tennessee**

Expected to beat out Terrance Copper for the No. 2 job.

**3-66 Usama Young, CB, Kent State**

Long and lanky with the speed to keep up in man coverage.

**3-88 Andy Alleman, G, Akron**

Nice size and athleticism but needs to develop as a run blocker.

**4-107 Antonio Pittman, RB, Ohio State**

A powerful inside runner with good hands and feet.

**4-125 Jermon Bushrod, OT, Towson**

Has good athleticism. Likely will switch to guard.

**5-145 David Jones, CB, Wingate**

Has enough speed and good size. Can he make the small-school leap?

**7-220 Marvin Mitchell, LB, Tennessee**

A reliable open-field tackler but isn't fast or athletic.

### VETERAN PLAYERS

**Additions:** CB Jason David (FA/Colts), P Chris Hanson (FA/Jaguars), TE Eric Johnson (FA/49ers), S Kevin Kaesviharn (FA/Bengals), K Olindo Mare (trade/Dolphins), WR David Patten (FA/Redskins), LB Brian Simmons (FA/Bengals).

**Losses:** K John Carney (FA), LB Danny Clark (FA/Texans), TE Ernie Conwell (FA), G Montrae Holland (FA/Panthers), WR Joe Horn (FA/Falcons), LB Terrence Melton (FA/Panthers), S Bryan Scott (FA/Titans), S Omar Stoutmire (FA/Redskins).

### STADIUM/MEDIA

Louisiana Superdome (65,000, artificial)

Tickets: 504-731-1700

Training camp: Millsaps College, Jackson, Miss.; 504-733-0255

Radio: WWL-AM (870)

Website: neworleansaints.com



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## PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
QB	▲ Drew Brees ● Jamie Martin	LE	▲ Will Smith ● Rob Ninkovich
FB	■ Mike Karney □ Kevin Dudley	DT	■ Hollis Thomas ● Rodney Leisle
RB	■ Deuce McAllister ● Reggie Bush	DT	■ Brian Young ● Antwan Lake
WR	● Robert Meachem ● Terrance Copper	RE	■ Charles Grant ● Willie Whitehead
WR	■ Marques Colston ● Devery Henderson	SLB	■ Scott Fujita □ Alfred Fincher
TE	● Eric Johnson ● Mark Campbell	MLB	■ Brian Simmons ■ Mark Simoneau
LT	■ Jammal Brown ● Zach Strief	WLB	■ Scott Shanle □ Troy Evans
LG	■ Jamar Nesbit ● Andy Alleman	LCB	■ Mike McKenzie ● Jason Craft
C	■ Jeff Faine ● Jonathan Goodwin	SS	■ Kevin Kaesviharn ● Roman Harper
RG	■ Jahri Evans ● Jonathan Goodwin	FS	● Josh Bullocks ● Jay Bellamy
RT	■ Jon Stinchcomb □ Rob Pettiti	RCB	● Jason David ● Fred Thomas

## SPECIALISTS

K	■ Olindo Mare	KR	■ Michael Lewis
P	■ Chris Hanson	PR	▲ Reggie Bush
		LS	■ Kevin Houser

▲ Elite ■ Solid ● Adequate □ Fringe  
Depth charts updated weekly at [sportingnews.com](http://sportingnews.com)



Meachem

JAY DROWNS / SN

## SAINTS ROSTER

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL exp.	College	How acq.	2006 GP/GS
QUARTERBACKS							
9	Drew Brees	6-0/209	1/15/79	7	Purdue	FA/06	16/16
11	Jason Fife	6-4/226	1/23/81	2	Oregon	FA/07	0/0
10	Jamie Martin	6-2/205	2/8/70	13	Weber State	FA/06	16/0
RUNNING BACKS							
35	Jamaal Branch	6-1/230	1/30/81	2	Colgate	FA/06	1/0
25	Reggie Bush	6-0/203	3/2/85	2	USC	D1/06	16/8
40	Kevin Dudley (FB)	6-0/238	1/2/82	2	Michigan	FA/07	1/0
44	Mike Karney (FB)	5-11/258	7/6/81	4	Arizona State	D5/04	15/7
26	Deuce McAllister	6-1/232	12/27/78	7	Mississippi	D1/01	15/13
24	Antonio Pittman	5-11/207	12/19/85	R	Ohio State	D4a/07	—
27	Aaron Stecker	5-10/213	11/13/75	8	Western Illinois	FA/04	12/1
RECEIVERS							
80	Mark Campbell (TE)	6-6/255	12/6/75	8	Michigan	FA/06	14/10
12	Marques Colston	6-4/231	6/5/83	2	Hofstra	D7b/06	14/12
18	Terrance Copper	6-0/201	3/12/82	4	East Carolina	W-Dal/06	15/4
19	Devery Henderson	5-11/200	3/26/82	4	LSU	D2/04	13/7
82	Eric Johnson (TE)	6-3/256	9/15/79	7	Yale	D7b/01	13/9
87	Robert Johnson (TE)	6-6/278	6/20/80	3	Auburn	FA/07	0/0
89	Jamal Jones	5-11/205	4/24/81	2	North Carolina A&T	FA/06	12/1
84	Michael Lewis	5-8/173	11/14/71	7	None	FA/01	10/0
85	Robert Meachem	6-2/214	9/28/84	R	Tennessee	D1/07	—
83	Billy Miller (TE)	6-3/252	4/24/77	8	USC	FA/06	10/3
16	Lance Moore	5-9/177	8/31/83	3	Toledo	FA/07	4/0
86	John Owens (TE)	6-3/255	1/10/80	5	Notre Dame	FA/06	5/0
81	David Patten	5-10/190	8/19/74	11	Western Carolina	FA/07	5/0
OFFENSIVE LINEMEN							
65	Andy Alleman (G)	6-4/302	11/20/83	R	Akron	D3b/07	—
60	Ben Archibald (T)	6-3/320	8/26/78	3	Brigham Young	FA/03	0/0
70	Jammal Brown (T)	6-6/316	3/30/81	3	Oklahoma	D1/05	15/15
74	Jermion Bushrod (T)	6-5/315	8/19/84	R	Towson	D4b/07	—
73	Jahri Evans (G)	6-4/318	8/22/83	2	Bloomsburg	D4/06	16/16
52	Jeff Faine (C)	6-3/291	4/6/81	5	Notre Dame	T-Cle/06	16/16
76	Jonathan Goodwin (G/C)	6-3/318	12/2/78	6	Michigan	FA/06	16/0
47	Kevin Houser (LS)	6-2/252	8/23/77	8	Ohio State	FA/02	16/0
67	Jamar Nesbit (G)	6-4/328	12/17/76	9	South Carolina	FA/04	16/16
79	Rob Pettiti (T)	6-6/327	5/21/82	3	Pitt	FA/06	1/0
75	Wes Sims (G)	6-4/317	4/8/81	3	Oklahoma	FA/07	0/0
78	Jon Stinchcomb (T)	6-5/315	8/27/79	5	Georgia	D2/03	16/16
64	Zach Strief (T)	6-7/349	9/22/83	2	Northwestern	D7a/06	9/1
68	Dave Yovanovits (G)	6-3/294	3/6/81	5	Temple	FA/07	0/0
DEFENSIVE LINEMEN							
	McKinley Boykin (T)	6-1/289	3/24/83	2	Mississippi	FA/07	0/0
97	Josh Cooper (E)	6-3/265	12/5/80	4	Mississippi	FA/06	5/1
	Willie Evans (E)	6-1/269	3/5/84	2	Mississippi St.	FA/07	0/0
94	Charles Grant (E)	6-3/290	9/3/78	6	Georgia	D1b/02	16/16
96	Antwan Lake (T)	6-4/308	7/10/79	5	West Virginia	FA/06	15/1
77	Rodney Leisle (T)	6-3/315	2/5/81	4	UCLA	D5/04	14/1
93	Rob Ninkovich (E)	6-2/252	2/1/84	2	Purdue	D5/06	3/0
91	Will Smith (E)	6-3/282	8/4/81	4	Ohio State	D1/04	14/14
99	Hollis Thomas (T)	6-0/306	1/10/74	11	Northern Illinois	T-Phi/06	12/12
90	Brandon Villarreal (T)	6-1/289	6/1/83	2	Purdue	FA/07	0/0
98	Willie Whitehead (E)	6-3/300	1/26/73	9	Auburn	FA/99	12/3
66	Brian Young (T)	6-2/298	7/8/77	8	UTEP	FA/04	16/16
LINEBACKERS							
54	Troy Evans	6-3/243	12/3/77	6	Cincinnati	FA/07	16/0
57	Trev Faulk	6-3/254	8/6/81	4	LSU	FA/07	0/0
56	Alfred Fincher	6-1/240	8/15/83	3	Connecticut	D3/05	6/0
55	Scott Fujita	6-5/250	4/28/79	6	California	FA/06	16/16
50	Marvin Mitchell	6-3/249	10/21/84	R	Tennessee	D7/07	—
58	Scott Shanle	6-2/245	11/23/79	5	Nebraska	T-Dal/06	16/15
51	Brian Simmons	6-3/240	6/21/75	10	North Carolina	FA/07	11/8
53	Mark Simoneau	6-0/245	1/16/77	8	Kansas State	T-Phi/06	16/13
DEFENSIVE BACKS							
20	Jay Bellamy (S)	5-11/200	7/8/72	14	Rutgers	FA/01	11/3
29	Josh Bullocks (S)	6-1/209	2/28/83	3	Nebraska	D2/05	16/16
21	Jason Craft (CB)	5-10/187	2/13/76	9	Colorado State	T-Jax/04	16/6
42	Jason David (CB)	5-8/180	6/12/82	4	Washington State	FA/07	16/16
37	Steve Gleason (S)	5-11/212	3/19/77	7	Washington State	FA/00	15/0
28	DeJuan Groce (CB)	5-10/192	2/17/80	5	Nebraska	W-Stl/06	12/0
41	Roman Harper (S)	6-1/200	12/11/82	2	Alabama	D2/06	5/5
30	David Jones (CB)	6-0/196	9/19/85	R	Wingate	D5/07	—
43	Kevin Kaesviharn (S)	6-1/194	8/29/76	7	Augustana (S.D.)	FA/07	14/7
34	Mike McKenzie (CB)	6-0/194	4/26/76	9	Memphis	T-GB/04	16/16
22	Fred Thomas (CB)	5-9/185	9/11/73	12	Tennessee-Martin	FA/00	13/13
38	Usama Young (CB)	6-0/194	5/8/85	R	Kent State	D3a/07	—
SPECIALISTS							
	Chris Hanson (P)	6-2/202	10/25/76	7	Marshall	FA/07	16/0
2	Olindo Mare (K)	5-11/190	6/6/73	11	Syracuse	T-Mia/07	16/0
7	Steve Weatherford (P)	6-3/215	12/17/82	2	Illinois	FA/06	16/0

Abbreviations: D1-draft pick, first round; W-claimed on waivers; T-obtained in trade; FA-free-agent acquisition.

# GIANTS

**The team has so many holes that any other organization would consider this a rebuilding year**

**SN PICK** 3rd, NFC East (6-10)

BY RALPH VACCHIANO

**T**he Giants' best player and most clutch performer over the past five years will be spending fall Sundays enjoying his retirement from the safety of an NBC studio.

And that's just the start of the Giants' problems.

As if replacing the irreplaceable Tiki Barber isn't enough of a headache, the Giants will be replacing a longtime starter at left tackle, breaking in two new outside linebackers, learning a defensive system from a new coordinator and adjusting to a new offensive coordinator.

In fact, there are so many changes in key places, the Giants have the look of a franchise that's ... shhh ... rebuilding. Not that they'll ever admit that, of course. There's too much at stake to utter the "R" word, especially for coach Tom Coughlin, who might again need to reach the playoffs to save his job.

## OFFENSE

Kevin Gilbride, promoted from quarterbacks coach to offensive coordinator, wants Eli Manning to become more of a down-field passer, and he's convinced his former pupil has the arm to do it. But that doesn't mean the Giants will stretch the field as if they're using a run-and-shoot. In fact, they would like to transition to more of a straight-ahead, power running game—something more suited to 6-4, 264-pound running back Brandon Jacobs. That, they hope, will open up more on the outside for Manning.

**Quarterbacks**—Manning needs to step up and show why the Giants traded the farm for his draft rights in 2004. So far all he has proved to be is maddeningly inconsistent, with a few flashes of brilliance interjected. More than anything, he needs to be more accurate. Manning has increased his completion percentage each year in the league, but it still is not good (54.1 percent overall)—especially deep. Gilbride says with better play-calling he can get Manning into a better rhythm and the accuracy will follow. No one doubts Manning's talent or his coolness under fire, though.

## SCHEDULE

All times Eastern

Sept. 9	at Dallas	8:15
Sept. 16	GREEN BAY	1:00
Sept. 23	at Washington	4:15
Sept. 30	PHILADELPHIA	8:15
Oct. 7	N.Y. JETS	1:00
Oct. 15	at Atlanta*	8:30
Oct. 21	SAN FRANCISCO	1:00
Oct. 28	vs. Miami§	1:00
Nov. 4	Open date	
Nov. 11	DALLAS	4:15
Nov. 18	at Detroit	4:15
Nov. 25	MINNESOTA	1:00
Dec. 2	at Chicago	4:15
Dec. 9	at Philadelphia	1:00
Dec. 16	WASHINGTON	8:15
Dec. 23	at Buffalo	1:00
Dec. 29	NEW ENGLAND††	8:15

Strength of schedule: T-21st

\*Monday †Saturday §in London

Analysis of every Giants game:  
sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom



Manning



BOB LEVERONE / SN

If anything happens to Manning, look for free-agent pickup Anthony Wright to get the call. Wright has a strong arm and is accurate. But his strength is the mobility that allows him to make something happen when the pocket breaks down. And Wright has made 19 NFL starts.

No. 3 hopeful Tim Hasselbeck also has starting experience, but he'll have to beat out Jared Lorenzen, who is a 285-pound question mark despite his three years in the league. **GRADE: B-**

**Running backs**—Physically filling the hole left by Barber won't be a problem for Jacobs, who dwarfs the Giants' all-time leading rusher by six inches and 50 pounds. But it might require a complete change in the philosophy of the running game. Barber stretched the field, ran to the outside and used his shifty moves to create holes. With Jacobs and No. 2 back Reuben Droughns—a smaller power back—the Giants' running game figures to become more smash-mouth. Jacobs has more speed and moves than he has shown so far, but he's most effective when he uses his size to bowl over linebackers instead of trying to run around them. Droughns' game is similar.

The Giants will use a fullback more often. Jim Finn is the incumbent, but he fits better with a shifty back like Barber behind him. The Giants likely will spend the summer searching for a free agent to challenge Finn in training camp.

There could be an open competition for the third running back spot, with veteran Derrick Ward leading the way. He has decent speed and also can return kickoffs. **GRADE: B+**

**Receivers**—When Plaxico Burress' head is in the game, he's as dangerous a receiver as there is in the league. When he stretches his long arms above his lanky, 6-5 body, there isn't a cornerback in the NFL who can outjump him for the ball. And if that's not enough the team can throw other looks at opponents because Burress has plenty of help. Manning's No. 2

## SCOUT TAKES

### A scout from another team sizes up the Giants

I think you'll see more of a typical committee backfield with **Reuben Droughns** and **Brandon Jacobs** splitting the carries.

It's not **Tiki Barber**, but they'll make the best of it. ... They've got some questions at linebacker—they're probably lacking coverage ability on the weak side—but **Antonio Pierce** is a good quarterback on defense who is able to make checks and get everybody lined up. ... It's probably a little discouraging that **Plaxico Burress** and **Jeremy Shockey** don't spend more time there in the offseason working with

**Eli Manning**, but Manning is becoming a veteran now. It's time for him to step up and show a little more consistency. ... Left tackle is probably the biggest question mark on the offensive line. I don't think **David Diehl** is a left tackle athletically. He's probably more of a right tackle-guard type of guy.



ALBERT DICKSON / SN

target is tight end Jeremy Shockey, who is happier and more effective as a receiver than a blocker. As dangerous as Burrell is on the outside, Shockey is just as big a threat inside.

That 1-2 punch is tough enough, but if their health holds up the Giants could have a devastating 3-4 punch, too. Veteran Amani Toomer has the best hands and field awareness on the team, but he's recovering from a torn ACL and there's no telling when or even if he'll be back at full speed. Another mystery is 5-8 dynamo Sinorice Moss, the perfect complement to the other three targets, each of whom has at least 7 inches on him. Moss is a shifty receiver, but he's a bit of an unknown after an injury-plagued rookie year. Team officials say two rookies, tight end Kevin Boss and wideout Steve Smith—who has been described as Toomer with more speed—also have the tools to contribute as backups. **GRADE: A-**

**Line**—David Diehl is taking over as the starting left tackle. He's strong enough, quick enough and smart enough to make the switch to the line's most important position. His bookend, Kareem McKenzie, is happy on the right side. Although he has been a little more penalty prone than expected, he has been a terrific run blocker and an adequate pass blocker. McKenzie is helped immensely by playing next to rising star Chris Snee, who anchors the Giants' up-the-middle rushing attack.

Center Shaun O'Hara is the leader of the unit, and though he doesn't provide a huge push he's strong enough to keep the defensive tackles out of the play. To his left figures to be Rich Seubert, returning to the starting lineup for the first time since he shattered his leg in 2003. He's a fierce competitor with a mean streak, but he probably isn't as quick as he was before the injury.

Veteran Grey Ruggamer is the primary backup at all three interior spots. He's big, smart and solid. The backup on the outside is Guy Whimper, a big, raw prospect who is considered the left tackle of the future. Some of his teammates say Whimper has progressed fast enough to push for playing time this year. **GRADE: B+**

## DEFENSE

If you can't beat them, steal from them. That's what the Giants did when they hired Eagles linebackers coach Steve Spagnuolo as their new coordinator. The Giants' defense lacked

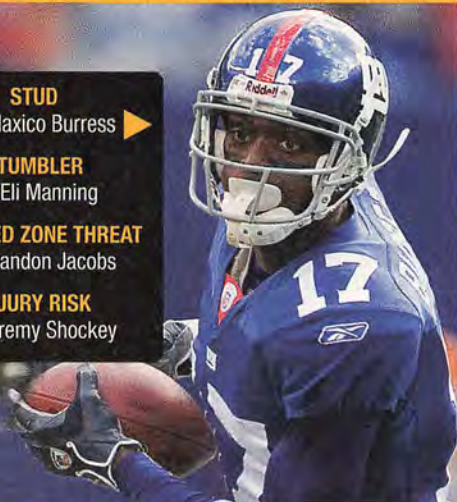
## FANTASY SOURCE PICKS

**STUD**  
WR Plaxico Burress ▶

**STUMBLER**  
QB Eli Manning

**BEST RED ZONE THREAT**  
RB Brandon Jacobs

**INJURY RISK**  
TE Jeremy Shockey



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BOB LEVERONE / SN

## SCOUTING REPORTS: OFFENSE

### Eli Manning, QB

**Strengths:** A smart player. Throws a good fade route. Has a good touch and short-to-intermediate accuracy. Has good mechanics, ideal height and above-average arm strength. Drops back and sets up quickly, holds the ball high and has a quick release. Has good field vision and is patient and aware in the pocket.

**Weaknesses:** Must stride fully into his throw to get the ball deep with any velocity. Struggles to make plays outside the pocket and lacks true speed and mobility.

**Bottom line:** Manning can be rattled if a defense gets to him early, but he comes from great genes and should continue to improve with experience. He is not at—and will not reach—his brother's level. **Grade: 7.4**

### Brandon Jacobs, RB

**Strengths:** A big, powerful runner who excels in short-yardage situations; a serious goal-line threat. Has very good leg drive and finishes his runs falling forward.

**Weaknesses:** Has marginal quickness; is not a home run threat. Has adequate receiving skills, but needs to improve as a blocker.

**Bottom line:** Coaches say Jacobs can handle a bigger load. He's no Tiki Barber, but he is a capable back with good tools. **Grade: 6.8**

### Reuben Droughns, RB

**Strengths:** Hits holes hard and keeps his feet moving. Runs with good balance and body control. A workhorse. Has solid hands, can catch outside his frame and advances upfield quickly. Extremely versatile and reliable.

**Weaknesses:** Runs tall and takes unnecessary hits. Doesn't consistently get outside and lacks top-end speed and burst. Doesn't cut sharply or elude defenders. Only an average blocker.

**Bottom line:** Droughns is a tough tackle-to-tackle runner who grinds out yards, but he is not a big playmaker or a threat to score. **Grade: 7.0**

### Plaxico Burress, WR

**Strengths:** Has a rare combination of size and speed. Has ideal jump-ball tools, adjusts to bad throws and can make acrobatic catches. Uses hands and upper-body strength to consistently release against press coverage.

Tough over the middle. Finds soft spots in zone coverage.

**Weaknesses:** Inconsistent; takes plays off. Has under-achieved in the red zone. Not a polished route runner and lacks burst. Drops some passes.

**Bottom line:** Burress can make big plays, but often disappears if he is not involved early in the game plan. He has the tools to take over a game when he is on. **Grade: 7.7**

### Amani Toomer, WR

**Strengths:** Has experience, good height and excellent hands. Drives off the line and challenges defensive backs. A smooth route runner who accelerates nicely out of his breaks. Adjusts well to balls in the air. Has a second gear after the catch and great leaping ability. Excels against man coverage.

**Weaknesses:** Has trouble with zone coverage. Is hesitant to go over the middle. Lacks aggressiveness as a blocker.

**Bottom line:** Toomer, who still is recovering from a torn ACL, is a polished veteran who could make Manning better if he's healthy. His presence in the lineup also could draw coverage away from Burress and Jeremy Shockey. **Grade: 7.0**

### Jeremy Shockey, TE

**Strengths:** Has a great combination of size, speed and quickness. Wastes little motion, adjusts to poor throws and can catch away from his body. A fierce competitor who wins most jump balls. Creates mismatches with his size. Has a very good feel for zone coverage. A punishing runner after the catch and an excellent red-zone target.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal strength, takes bad angles and plays with poor leverage. Can be overaggressive and lose focus.

**Bottom line:** Shockey's knack for stretching the seam more than makes up for his lack of blocking ability. **Grade: 8.7**



Players are graded by War Room scouts on a 1-10 scale.  
\*Rookies (not graded)



BOB LEVERONE / SN

### Kareem McKenzie, T

**Strengths:** Has excellent size, is physical and plays with a mean streak. Can knock back defenders and rarely loses a matchup once he locks on. Maintains separation and rarely gives ground to bull rushers.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks quickness. Sometimes sets up slowly in pass protection and does not always play with urgency. Conditioning and durability are concerns.

**Bottom line:** McKenzie is a stronger run blocker than pass protector, but he has solid all-around skills. **Grade: 7.5**

### David Diehl, T

**Strengths:** An explosive run blocker who drives with his legs and finishes blocks. Forces pass rushers to take wide angles. Has good initial quickness and moves well laterally.

**Weaknesses:** Inconsistent in pass protection; sets up late and has trouble with edge rushers. Loses his base, is stiff and lunges too often.

**Bottom line:** Diehl is a road grader in the running game. His move to left tackle, though, means he must improve as a pass blocker. **Grade: 7.0**

### Chris Snee, G

**Strengths:** Has great size, good strength and remarkable quickness. Very effective on pulls and traps. Plays with good leverage and a good base. Uses his hands well. Doesn't lose many battles once he locks on. Wastes little motion. Picks up stunts and blitzes.

**Weaknesses:** Struggles in space and doesn't change direction well. Vulnerable to speed rushers and good double moves.

**Bottom line:** An underrated player, Snee gets better every year. He's a road grader as a run blocker. **Grade: 8.5**

### Rich Seubert, G

**Strengths:** Has an explosive first step, takes great angles and rarely is out of position. Can reset his feet in pass protection and has enough quickness to redirect.

**Weaknesses:** Does not have great lower-body strength and struggles against bigger defensive tackles. Has difficulty getting movement in the running game.

**Bottom line:** Seubert has lost a step since hurting his leg in 2003, but he still is an asset. **Grade: 5.9**

### Shaun O'Hara, C

**Strengths:** Has good speed, agility and technique. Can pull on screens and traps and is comfortable in space. Has the initial quickness to get in position. Takes good angles and reads defenses well; can pick up the blitz. Plays with a high motor and finishes blocks.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks bulk and strength; can be pushed back in short-yardage situations. Plays with inconsistent leverage and base.

**Bottom line:** O'Hara is very athletic, and his ability to play several roles makes him valuable. **Grade: 7.1**

**KEY:** ↑ Ascending ↓ Descending

## INSIDERS POLL

### How much will the Giants miss Tiki Barber?

Not much, thanks to Brandon Jacobs and Reuben Droughns

Quite a bit

Baby, come back!



Based on a poll of SN's 32 team correspondents

## BOLD PREDICTIONS

**1** RB Brandon Jacobs will top 1,500 yards, have at least one 200-yard game and miss at least one game with an injury.

**2** WR Amani Toomer won't miss a game, but he'll lose playing time to Sinorice Moss because of a slower-than-expected recovery from a torn ACL.

**3** DEs Michael Strahan and Osi Umenyiora, who combined for nine sacks last season, will combine for 20 this season. Umenyiora will have 15 of them.

aggressiveness under old coordinator Tim Lewis and, despite two great pass-rushing ends and decent speed in the back seven, blitzed ineffectively. Expect to see more pressure from linebackers, safeties and corners as Spagnuolo implements a blitz-happy scheme similar to Philadelphia's. And that should make Pro Bowl ends Osi Umenyiora and Michael Strahan even more effective.

**Line—**The strength of this unit is on the outside with Strahan and Umenyiora. They used to be backed up by the speedy Mathias Kiwanuka, but he has been moved to linebacker. Justin Tuck, the new backup end, has some speed, too. But he will need to prove his effectiveness coming off foot surgery. Strahan also is coming off a foot injury that could limit his ability to push off, and his effectiveness. He's still strong and smart enough to be at least as good as most ends in the league. The potential for Strahan's drop-off means this could be Umenyiora's year to emerge. He's the total package, and he has learned enough from Strahan to be effective against the run.

Inside, though, is less stable. Nose tackle Barry Cofield was

solid as a rookie but didn't provide much of an interior push. That came from veteran Fred Robbins at the off-tackle spot, where he had a career year. If Robbins can't duplicate last season, he could be replaced by third-round pick Jay Alford, who has a terrific first step that can throw interior linemen off-balance. There also is the possibility 2003 first-rounder William Joseph finally will show signs of his ability, but it's more likely he will be a fringe backup. **GRADE: B-**

**Linebackers**—Pro Bowl player Antonio Pierce is back in the middle and the leader of the defense. He won't meet running backs in head-on collisions at the line, but he's extremely effective with his ability to cover the entire field.

The team is so concerned about the outside that it is moving Kiwanuka to linebacker. He was an undersized end but is a huge linebacker with terrific speed. Coaches envision him lining up on the line on the strong side, leaving the offense to guess whether he'll drop into coverage or rush the passer. Gerris Wilkinson will step in for LaVar Arrington on the weak side. Wilkinson was a nonfactor as a rookie, but the new aggressive defense will be tailor-made for his wiry frame and speed. If either has trouble, there is free agent Kawika Mitchell, a converted middle linebacker. Coverage has been his strength, so that should help him in the transition. He's athletic, quick and a good fit in Spagnuolo's scheme.

Fourth-round pick Zak DeOssie will battle Reggie Torbor to be the backup on the strong side. DeOssie has great size and good speed and instincts but needs to step up his game. Torbor is a linebacker/end 'tweener and could benefit from the change in system. The best backup is in the middle, where the underrated Chase Blackburn has Pierce-like skills. **GRADE: C+**

**Secondary**—For better or worse, all of last season's starters return from a unit that must improve. At cornerback, veteran Sam Madison has lost a step and Corey Webster looked more lost in his second season than he did as a rookie. The hope, though, comes in the departure of Lewis, the coordinator who apparently was so hard on Webster that he shattered his confidence. Webster already feels like a weight has been lifted, and he could show off his rumored ball sense in the attacking scheme. The only new help comes in top pick Aaron Ross. He is big and has a knack for finding the ball but is susceptible to smaller receivers who could come up with big plays underneath him.

## SECRET WEAPON

### GIBRIL WILSON, S

As a rookie in 2004, he showed the potential to be a jarring hitter and dangerous playmaker, but he hasn't lived up to that potential. This year he could help the aggressive defense as a factor on both ends—a speedy blitzing delivering big hits and a key weapon picking off passes in the secondary.



JOHN DUNN FOR SN

## SCOUTING REPORTS: DEFENSE

### ↓ Michael Strahan, E

**Strengths:** Very quick and explosive off the line. Has tremendous strength and balance. Plays with great leverage. Never stops moving his feet. Has a variety of pass-rush moves and counters. Also an excellent run de-fender. Diagnoses and reacts quickly.

**Weaknesses:** Has healthy issues. Vulnerable to low blocks. Doesn't vigorously pursue plays away from him; tends to conserve his energy for pass rushing and defending the point of attack.

**Bottom line:** Strahan is aging, but he still plays with the youth of a 25-year-old. And with injuries and off-field distractions behind him, he should be a better player in 2007. **Grade: 8.8**

### ↑ Osi Umenyiora, E

**Strengths:** Has explosive initial quickness and speed. Best on slants and stunts. Has good upper-body strength. When he connects with his hands, he plays with good leverage and has the ability to lock out the blocker. Has a quick shed.

**Weaknesses:** Plays high off the line and gets cut easily. Gets sloppy with his technique and doesn't always play smart with his hands.

**Bottom line:** Umenyiora has become more consistent against the run and never stops working as a pass rusher. **Grade: 8.7**

### ↓ Fred Robbins, T

**Strengths:** Big, strong and athletic. Can control the line of scrimmage and collapse the pocket. Has quick feet and plays with good leverage. Pursues well down the line.

**Weaknesses:** Doesn't explode out of his stance. Effort downfield is marginal.

**Bottom line:** Robbins has the ability to make plays when he stays low and gives the required effort. **Grade: 6.9**

### Barry Cofield, T

**Strengths:** Well built, athletic, durable and powerful. Shows good speed and changes direction well. Intense and aggressive in pursuit. Plays with good leverage. Hits hard and takes good angles.

**Weaknesses:** Plays with a narrow base. Sometimes comes out of his stance too upright, allowing opponents to get under him. Lacks the acceleration and closing burst to be

effective off the edge. Doesn't always hustle.

**Bottom line:** Cofield is versatile but lacks any elite qualities. His nose for the ball, however, makes him a valuable two-way player. **Grade: 6.2**

### Antonio Pierce, LB

**Strengths:** Has very good instincts and an explosive first step. Slips blocks, takes excellent angles and has sideline-to-sideline range. Relentless in pursuit and changes direction well. Closes hard on the blitz. Rarely misses open-field tackles.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal bulk, power and durability. Doesn't shed blockers well once they've locked on.

**Bottom line:** Pierce occasionally opens up running lanes while trying to avoid blocks, but his instincts, technique and range make him a fine starter as long as he stays healthy. **Grade: 7.9**

### Mathias Kiwanuka, LB

**Strengths:** Has a nonstop motor and makes plays downfield. Has rare closing speed and plays well in pursuit. Has great straight-line speed, long arms and a variety of pass-rush moves. Instinctive, powerful tackler.

**Weaknesses:** Plays too high. Lacks aggressiveness at times. Not very quick off the ball.

**Bottom line:** Kiwanuka was undersized for an end, but he has great size and speed for a linebacker. **Grade: 7.8**

### Kawika Mitchell, LB

**Strengths:** Has solid speed and range and can make plays sideline to sideline. Does a nice job of pursuing the ball. Uses his hands well and has the strength to hit and separate.

**Weaknesses:** Has marginal change-of-direction ability and flexibility. Gets too aggressive, then overruns plays or takes poor angles.

**Bottom line:** Mitchell's athleticism, range and ability to make the big play will benefit the Giants. **Grade: 7.5**

### Gerris Wilkinson, LB

**Strengths:** Shows good quickness, change-of-direction skills and lateral movement. A solid open-field tackler. Has an explosive first step and nice closing burst. In coverage, drops quickly into deep zones.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks the speed to dominate outside. Must add bulk to his tall, lean frame to hold ground at the

point of attack; gets engulfed by offensive linemen. Must use hands better to shed blockers.

**Bottom line:** Wilkinson has the intelligence and versatility to play multiple positions. He will be productive in 2007. **Grade: 6.2**

#### ↓ Sam Madison, CB

**Strengths:** Extremely durable and reliable, with above-average speed. Has excellent recognition skills and is aggressive in coverage. Does a good job of using his shoulder to make up for his lack of strength.

**Weaknesses:** Has lost a step and can't make up for mistakes like he used to. Has problems with physical opponents and needs help against elite wide receivers.

**Bottom line:** No longer an elite cover corner, Madison still is above average. **Grade: 7.3**

#### ↓ Corey Webster, CB

**Strengths:** Has above-average instincts and great hands. Uses his strength to bump receivers off routes. Can compete in press coverage. Good downhill player who does well with the play in front of him.

**Weaknesses:** Not very athletic. Lacks ideal speed and ability to change direction; struggles to stay with receivers in the open field.

**Bottom line:** Webster has good size

and is a physical defender, but lack of speed and athleticism limits the Giants' coverage schemes. **Grade: 7.0**

#### Will Demps, S

**Strengths:** Plays with passion. Smart, physical and tough with solid instincts. Maintains good leverage and has decent range. A good tackler in the box and willing in run support.

**Weaknesses:** Has just average height, weight and speed. Occasionally takes bad angles. Can be caught out of position.

**Bottom line:** Demps is a steady player with excellent intangibles, but he must play with more confidence and be a leader in the secondary. **Grade: 8.0**

#### ↑ Gibril Wilson, S

**Strengths:** Has a good combination of size, speed and quickness. Very physical and aggressive; plays like a linebacker in the box. Has excellent body control, good leaping ability and above-average ball skills.

**Weaknesses:** Hurts himself with false steps, bad angles and wasted motion. Doesn't always play under control. Gets beat on too many double moves and has questionable makeup speed.

**Bottom line:** An athletic, high-motor player, Wilson is a player on the rise. **Grade: 7.2**



Pierce

BOB LEVERONE / SN

## KEY MOVES

### 2007 DRAFT PICKS

Rd.-Pick

GRADE **B+**

#### 1-20 Aaron Ross, CB, Texas

Excels in press coverage. Has a nose for the ball. Will return punts.

#### 2-51 Steve Smith, WR, USC

Tough, durable player who adds solid depth at an injury-plagued position.

#### 3-81 Jay Alford, DT, Penn State

Will play behind Fred Robbins but could develop into a force inside.

#### 4-116 Zak DeOssie, LB, Brown

Has tremendous smarts and the speed to be an effective blitzer.

#### 5-153 Kevin Boss, TE, Western Oregon

Must improve his technique. Has good speed and soft hands.

#### 6-189 Adam Koets, OT, Oregon State

A project who could compete for a job in 2008.

#### 7-224 Michael Johnson, S, Arizona

Surrounded by questions but could be a good special teams player.

#### 7-250 Ahmad Bradshaw, RB, Marshall

Has the size (5-9, 198) and skills to be a third-down back.

### VETERAN PLAYERS

**Additions:** RB Reuben Droughns (trade/Browns), LB Kawika Mitchell (FA/Chiefs), QB Anthony Wright (FA/Bengals).

**Losses:** LB LaVar Arrington (FA), RB Tiki Barber (retired), WR Tim Carter (trade/Browns), LB Carlos Emmons (FA), K Jay Feely (FA/Dolphins), KR Chad Morton (FA), OT Luke Petitgout (FA/Buccaneers), TE Visanthe Shiancoe (FA/Vikings), LB Brandon Short (FA), CB Frank Walker (FA/Packers), OT Bob Whitfield (retired).

The new scheme also could be good news for safeties Gibril Wilson and Will Demps, who had big reputations and little impact last season. This year, both will be in better position to make plays and likely will see more time on blitzes. If either falters, he could be pushed by the promising James Butler, who has the speed and size to play the position and has flashed occasional play-making skills.

The best playmaker in the secondary might be veteran nickel back R.W. McQuarters, who showed the best nose for the ball last season. But he will be pushed by Ross. **GRADE: D**

### SPECIAL TEAMS

Expectations are high because all the pieces are in place for a dominating unit. The most dangerous duo is ageless punter Jeff Feagles and his top cover man, David Tyree. No one in the league is better than Feagles at dropping a punt inside the 5-yard line, and nobody is better than Tyree at downing it before it reaches the end zone.

The return game was not exciting last year, but it will receive a boost from Moss. He will bring speed to the job of kickoff returner, a luxury the Giants haven't had in years. He might end up as the punt returner, too, but McQuarters will enter camp as the incumbent because of his solid hands. Ross, the rookie, also could be a factor.

The biggest question will be in the kicking game. The team has a flawless long snapper in Ryan Kuehl and an outstanding holder in Feagles, but an untested kicker in Josh Huston. He is touted as having a big leg and a knack for kicking in bad weather. But he never has kicked in the NFL and has only one year of competitive kicking in his seven years since high school. His

lack of experience will make many nervous if he's in a position to win or lose a game. **GRADE: B**

## BOTTOM LINE

The Giants were 8-8 with Barber last season; how can they be better without him? The truth is, they probably can't. Jacobs is a star in the making, but to duplicate Barber he'll have to do more than accumulate yards. He'll need to carry a flawed offense on his back. It won't help that the Giants will be burdened by a defense filled with holes. Add in a couple of aging stars returning from injuries and a quarterback who hasn't hit his stride yet, and things don't look promising for Coughlin. He salvaged a playoff berth and his job last season. He's not likely to do it again. **SN**

Ralph Vacchiano covers the Giants for the New York Daily News.

## STADIUM/MEDIA

Giants Stadium (80,282, artificial)

Tickets: 201-935-8222

Training camp: University at Albany, Albany, N.Y.; 518-442-7340

Radio: WFAN-AM (660)

Website: giants.com

## PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

### OFFENSE

- QB** ■ Eli Manning  
● Anthony Wright
- FB** ■ Jim Finn
- RB** ■ Brandon Jacobs  
● Reuben Droughns
- WR** ▲ Plaxico Burress  
■ Sinorice Moss
- WR** ■ Amani Toomer  
● Steve Smith
- TE** ▲ Jeremy Shockey  
□ Kevin Boss
- LT** ■ David Diehl  
□ Guy Whimper
- LG** ■ Rich Seubert  
● Grey Ruegamer
- C** ■ Shaun O'Hara  
■ Rich Seubert
- RG** ▲ Chris Snee  
● Grey Ruegamer
- RT** ■ Kareem McKenzie  
□ Guy Whimper

### DEFENSE

- LE** ▲ Michael Strahan  
● Justin Tuck
- NT** ● Barry Cofield  
□ William Joseph
- DT** ■ Fred Robbins  
□ Jay Alford
- RE** ▲ Osi Umenyiora  
□ Adrian Awosom
- SLB** ■ Mathias Kiwanuka  
● Zak DeOssie
- MLB** ▲ Antonio Pierce  
● Chase Blackburn
- WLB** ● Gerris Wilkinson  
● Kawika Mitchell
- LCB** ■ Sam Madison  
● Aaron Ross
- SS** ■ Gibril Wilson  
□ Jason Bell
- FS** ● Will Demps  
● James Butler
- RCB** ● Corey Webster  
● R.W. McQuarters

### SPECIALISTS

- K** □ Josh Huston
- P** ▲ Jeff Feagles
- KR** ■ Sinorice Moss
- PR** ● R.W. McQuarters
- LS** ▲ Ryan Kuehl

▲ Elite ■ Solid ● Adequate □ Fringe

Depth charts updated weekly at [sportingnews.com](http://sportingnews.com)

## GIANTS ROSTER

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL exp.	College	How acq.	2006 GP/GS
<b>QUARTERBACKS</b>							
8	Tim Hasselbeck	6-1/211	4/6/78	6	Boston College	W-Was/05	0/0
12	Jared Lorenzen	6-4/285	2/14/81	3	Kentucky	FA/04	2/0
10	Eli Manning	6-4/225	1/3/81	4	Mississippi	T-SD/04	16/16
2	Anthony Wright	6-1/211	2/14/76	8	South Carolina	FA/07	4/0
<b>RUNNING BACKS</b>							
	Ahmad Bradshaw	5-9/198		R	Marshall	D7b/07	—
24	Robert Douglas	6-1/230	7/25/82	1	Memphis	FA/06	0/0
22	Reuben Droughns	5-11/220	8/21/78	8	Oregon	T-Cle/07	14/12
20	Jim Finn (FB)	6-0/245	12/2/76	8	Pennsylvania	FA/03	16/11
47	Ryan Grant	6-1/218	12/9/82	1	Notre Dame	FA/05	0/0
27	Brandon Jacobs	6-4/264	7/6/82	3	Southern Illinois	D4/05	15/0
34	Derrick Ward	5-11/233	8/30/80	4	Ottawa	D7c/04	8/0
<b>RECEIVERS</b>							
89	Kevin Boss (TE)	6-6/257	1/11/84	R	Western Oregon	D5/07	—
17	Plaxico Burress	6-5/232	8/12/77	8	Michigan State	FA/05	15/15
15	Michael Jennings	5-11/181	9/7/79	2	Florida State	FA/04	8/0
48	Darcy Johnson (TE)	6-5/252	2/11/83	2	Central Florida	FA/06	1/0
89	Sinorice Moss	5-8/185	12/28/83	2	Miami	D2/06	6/0
80	Jeremy Shockey (TE)	6-5/253	8/18/80	6	Miami	D1/02	15/15
12	Steve Smith	5-11/197	5/6/85	R	USC	D2/07	—
81	Amani Toomer	6-3/208	9/8/74	12	Michigan	D2/96	8/8
85	David Tyree	6-0/205	1/3/80	5	Syracuse	D6c/03	16/1
87	Darius Watts	6-2/190	12/19/81	4	Marshall	FA/06	0/0
<b>OFFENSIVE LINEMEN</b>							
66	David Diehl (G)	6-5/315	9/15/80	5	Illinois	D5/03	16/16
71	Jonathan Dunn (T)	6-7/324	12/12/81	2	Virginia Tech	FA/06	0/0
61	Adam Koets (T)	6-5/298	1/7/84	R	Oregon State	D6/07	—
64	Matt Lentz (G)	6-6/320	11/19/82	1	Michigan	FA/06	0/0
62	Todd Londo (G/T)	6-5/301	4/4/83	1	Miami (Ohio)	FA/06	0/0
67	Kareem McKenzie (T)	6-6/327	5/24/79	7	Penn State	FA/05	15/15
60	Shaun O'Hara (C)	6-3/306	6/23/77	8	Rutgers	FA/00	15/15
65	Grey Ruegamer (G)	6-4/299	6/11/76	9	Arizona State	FA/06	16/1
69	Rich Seubert (G)	6-3/305	3/30/79	7	Western Illinois	FA/01	14/3
76	Chris Snee (G)	6-3/314	1/8/82	4	Boston College	D2/04	16/16
79	Guy Whimper (T)	6-5/300	5/21/83	2	East Carolina	D4b/06	8/0
<b>DEFENSIVE LINEMEN</b>							
93	Titus Adams (T)	6-4/305	1/28/83	1	Nebraska	FA/06	0/0
73	Jay Alford (T)	6-3/304	5/28/83	R	Penn State	D3/07	—
95	Adrian Awosom (E)	6-5/275	10/25/83	3	North Texas	FA/05	10/0
99	Marcus Bell (T)	6-2/339	6/1/79	7	Memphis	FA/07	13/7
96	Barry Cofield (T)	6-4/304	3/19/84	2	Northwestern	D4a/06	16/16
74	Tommy Davis (E)	6-2/257	10/18/82	1	North Carolina	FA/06	0/0
94	William Joseph (T)	6-5/308	9/3/79	5	Miami	D1/03	16/3
90	Ryan Kuehl (LS)	6-5/280	1/18/72	11	Virginia	FA/03	16/0
98	Fred Robbins (T)	6-4/317	3/25/77	8	Wake Forest	FA/04	16/16
75	Jonas Seawright (T)	6-6/335	4/12/82	2	North Carolina	FA/05	9/0
92	Michael Strahan (E)	6-5/255	11/21/71	15	Texas Southern	D2/93	9/9
91	Justin Tuck (E)	6-5/275	3/29/83	3	Notre Dame	D3/05	6/0
72	Osi Umenyiora (E)	6-3/261	11/16/81	5	Troy	D2/03	11/11
<b>LINEBACKERS</b>							
57	Chase Blackburn	6-3/247	6/10/83	3	Akron	FA/05	16/0
52	James Davis	6-1/240	4/26/79	4	West Virginia	FA/07	0/0
51	Zak DeOssie	6-4/250	5/24/84	R	Brown	D4/07	—
97	Mathias Kiwanuka	6-5/265	3/8/83	2	Boston College	D1/06	16/9
55	Kawika Mitchell	6-1/253	10/10/79	5	South Florida	FA/07	16/16
58	Antonio Pierce	6-1/240	10/26/78	7	Arizona	FA/05	16/16
48	Tyson Smith	6-2/240	10/9/81	2	Iowa State	FA/06	3/0
53	Reggie Torbor	6-2/254	1/25/81	4	Auburn	D4/04	16/3
59	Gerris Wilkinson	6-3/233	4/5/83	2	Georgia Tech	D3/06	16/2
<b>DEFENSIVE BACKS</b>							
33	Jason Bell (S)	6-0/196	4/1/78	7	UCLA	FA/06	15/1
37	James Butler (S)	6-3/210	9/7/82	3	Georgia Tech	FA/05	14/0
47	Will Demps (S)	6-0/205	11/7/79	6	San Diego State	FA/06	16/16
35	Kevin Dockery (CB)	5-8/188	1/8/84	2	Mississippi State	FA/06	14/0
43	Michael Johnson (S)	6-2/211	5/9/84	R	Arizona	D7a/07	—
22	Sam Madison (CB)	5-11/185	4/23/74	11	Louisville	FA/06	12/12
38	Gerrick McPhearson (CB)	5-10/196	12/29/83	2	Maryland	D7/06	0/0
25	R.W. McQuarters (CB)	5-10/195	12/21/76	10	Oklahoma State	FA/06	16/10
31	Aaron Ross (CB)	6-0/193	9/15/82	R	Texas	D1/07	—
44	Michael Stone (S)	6-0/201	2/13/78	6	Memphis	FA/07	2/0
23	Corey Webster (CB)	6-0/199	3/2/82	3	LSU	D2/05	12/10
28	Gibril Wilson (S)	6-0/209	11/12/81	4	Tennessee	D5/04	15/15
<b>SPECIALISTS</b>							
18	Jeff Feagles (P)	6-1/215	3/7/66	20	Miami	FA/03	16/0
5	Josh Huston (K)	6-1/209	2/28/82	1	Ohio State	FA/07	0/0

Abbreviations: D1-draft pick, first round; W-claimed on waivers; T-obtained in trade; FA-free-agent acquisition.

Jim Hurley,  
Founder & President  
Jim Hurley's Network®

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PHILADELPHIA

NFC

# EAGLES

**A balanced offense—more than the identity of the QB—could be key to the Eagles' playoff hopes**

**SN PICK** 2nd, NFC East (9-7)

BY MARK ECKEL

**T**he Eagles' success this season depends on the health of quarterback Donovan McNabb. Or does it? McNabb, coming back from a torn ACL, has started just 18 of the team's last 32 regular-season games. In those, the Eagles were 9-9. In the 14 games he missed because of injury, the team was 7-7.

Not much of a difference, huh? Because McNabb has been injured four of the past five seasons and his status to start the season is unknown, maybe the Eagles' success depends on their backup quarterback.

Or, more realistically, it could depend on running back Brian Westbrook, who showed at the end of last season he can carry the team, and the defense, which must be better than it has been the past two years.

## OFFENSE

When McNabb went out for the season last year, coach Andy Reid turned the play-calling duties over to coordinator Marty Mornhinweg and the offense became more balanced as far as the pass/run ratio. Westbrook also became more involved as both a runner and receiver and nearly reached 2,000 total yards. The team's West Coast attack always will lean more toward throwing the ball than running it, but if the Eagles stay around 55-45, as opposed to 65-35, they will see more success.

**Quarterbacks**—McNabb spent the offseason rehabbing his knee, with the goal of being ready for the regular-season opener. Whether that will actually happen remains to be seen. What will be more interesting is how McNabb's return affects the rest of the offense. McNabb always has been the focal point of the attack. Last year before his injury, he had just one game in which he threw fewer than 30 times. When Jeff Garcia stepped in and Mornhinweg started calling plays, the numbers changed. Garcia threw more than 30 times just once. McNabb likely will be more effective and efficient in a more balanced offense.

A.J. Feeley, who returned to the team last season after stints in Miami and San Diego, will be McNabb's top backup. Feeley has been a perfect fit in Reid's

## SCHEDULE

*All times Eastern*

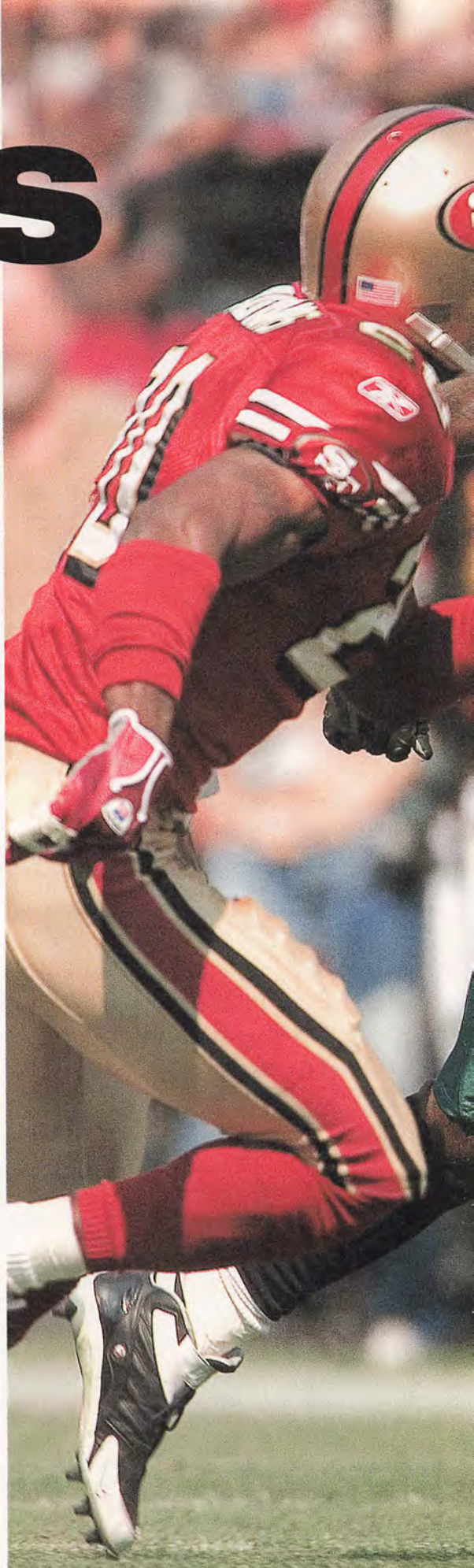
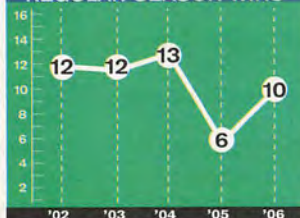
Sept. 9	at Green Bay	1:00
Sept. 17	WASHINGTON*	8:30
Sept. 23	DETROIT	1:00
Sept. 30	at N.Y. Giants	8:15
Oct. 7	Open date	
Oct. 14	at N.Y. Jets	1:00
Oct. 21	CHICAGO	4:15
Oct. 28	at Minnesota	1:00
Nov. 4	DALLAS	8:15
Nov. 11	at Washington	1:00
Nov. 18	MIAMI	1:00
Nov. 25	at New England	8:15
Dec. 2	SEATTLE	1:00
Dec. 9	N.Y. GIANTS	1:00
Dec. 16	at Dallas	4:15
Dec. 23	at New Orleans	1:00
Dec. 30	BUFFALO	1:00

Strength of schedule: T-18th

\*Monday

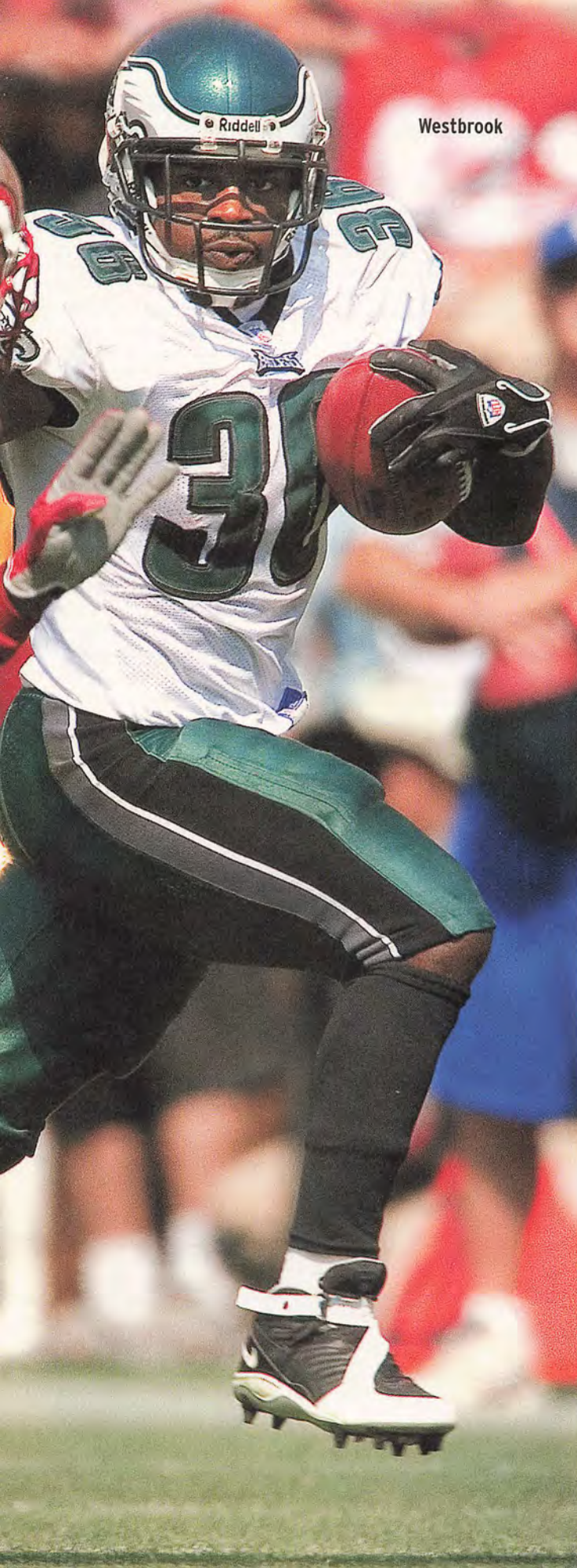
Analysis of every Eagles game:  
[sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom](http://sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom)

## REGULAR-SEASON WINS





Westbrook



ROBERT SEALE / SN ARCHIVES

system; he is 7-1 and has posted efficient numbers that complement a balanced attack. He doesn't have an exceptionally strong arm, but Feeley runs the system well and is accurate on short- and medium-range passes.

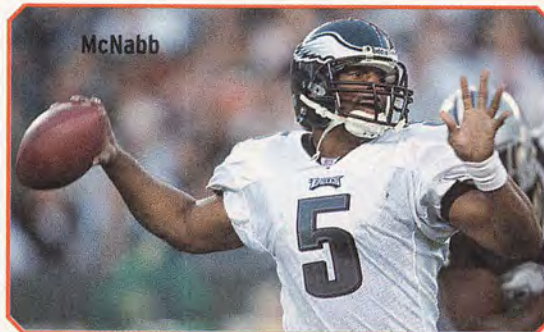
The team drafted McNabb's heir apparent in Kevin Kolb, who ran a spread offense at Houston. Reid believes Kolb will adjust easily to the pro set. **GRADE: B+**

**Running backs**—Westbrook has developed into the perfect back for the system. He can run and catch. His blocking is just OK, but complaining about that is like complaining that your supermodel wife isn't that good a cook. When McNabb was out last season, Westbrook became the team's offensive leader. In the past, the coaching staff questioned his durability and seemed overly concerned about overusing him. He erased most of those doubts by staying healthy and producing in a big way.

Rookie Tony Hunt gives the team the short-yardage back it needed. At 239 pounds, he is a nice complement to Westbrook. Correll Buckhalter came back and played a full season in '06 after missing three of the previous four years with knee injuries. The injuries robbed Buckhalter of some of his speed, but he is a tough runner who has developed into more of a complete back as far as his receiving and blocking skills go.

Fullback Thomas Tapeh is a decent blocker but only plays about a third of the snaps. **GRADE: B**

## SCOUT TAKES



ALBERT DICKSON / SN

### A scout from another team sizes up the Eagles

When they re-sign **A.J. Feeley**, trade for **Kelly Holcomb** and draft **Kevin Kolb** with their top pick, they're telling you they're worried about **Donovan McNabb** getting hurt. But if he stays healthy, he can be the McNabb of old. No doubt in my mind. ... **Brian Westbrook's** ability to get open and make guys miss is what makes him such a great back. Linebackers struggle with him because he is so shifty and quick. ... There's no way an instinctive linebacker like **Takeo Spikes**, who's physical and tough, can't help their defense. It's just how much gas does he have left in the tank? I think he still has one or two years left. ... **Kevin Curtis** is one of the most underrated receivers in the game. He was stuck behind two great ones in St. Louis but still managed to put up good numbers. Eagles fans will be really excited about him before the season is over.

## FANTASY SOURCE PICKS

## STUD

RB Brian Westbrook

## SLEEPER ►

TE L.J. Smith

BIGGEST  
RISK/REWARD

QB Donovan McNabb

## TOP NEWCOMER

WR Kevin Curtis

BOB LEVERONE / SN

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### Receivers—Reggie Brown and Kevin Curtis are the starters.

Although the team rarely distinguishes between who is No. 1 and who is No. 2, expect Brown to get the slight majority of throws. Brown is ideal for the system. He lacks true breakaway speed, but he runs good routes and knows how to get separation. He also has decent size (6-1, 197) and hands and gets into the end zone. Curtis was signed as a free agent to provide a deep threat with his outside speed. The questions about Curtis are how he will adapt from the Rams' vertical offense to Reid's West Coast system and how much Curtis benefited from having Torry Holt and Isaac Bruce in the offense with him.

Hank Baskett had a surprisingly good rookie season. The team will look for him to use his size (6-4, 220) and deceptive speed to be a factor out of the slot when it goes to a three-receiver set, which it often does. The Eagles also want to get Jason Avant involved in those packages. He doesn't have the speed to separate from corners, but the team likes his hands and ability to go over the middle.

Tight end L.J. Smith caught 50 passes last season but only nine over the final five games with Garcia at quarterback. It might have been the result of Garcia looking outside first, the team running the ball more or Smith becoming more of a blocker. Matt Schobel was expected to challenge Smith last season, but his hands haven't been good enough. **GRADE: B-**

**Line**—The line became better—even dominant—as the offense became more balanced. Jon Runyan is a model of dependability and durability. He played at a Pro Bowl level again last season, especially as a run blocker. Speed rushers still gave him some trouble, but he has improved dramatically against them. Left tackle William Thomas battled back from injuries to play well. Thomas is more of a pass protector than a road grader, but he handled himself quite nicely as the team ramped up the running game.

Right guard Shawn Andrews, voted to his first Pro Bowl last year, was the team's best all-around lineman and exceptional as a run blocker. Andrews, whose weight had fluctuated dangerously close to 400 pounds, trimmed down to the 330s, which boosted his play. Left guard Todd Herremans moved inside

## SCOUTING REPORTS: OFFENSE

## Donovan McNabb, QB

**Strengths:** A strong runner with good size and strength. Has a big-time arm. Can make any throw. Sets up quickly. A leader and very good athlete. Tough to sack because of his shiftiness in the pocket and strength. Has great poise.

**Weaknesses:** Struggles with accuracy and touch. Does not always set his feet on his throws when he has the time to do so. Throws a lot of low balls. Makes his receivers work to make the catch. Has durability issues. **Bottom line:** Injuries have taken their toll on McNabb, but he showed last season he still can be a top-tier quarterback when healthy. Though top target Donte' Stallworth is gone, the emergence of Brian Westbrook will take pressure off McNabb. **Grade: 8.7**

## ► Brian Westbrook, RB

**Strengths:** Has great open-field moves, vision and ability to change direction. Can string moves together. Has great balance and is capable of bouncing runs outside when necessary. Can line up all over the field and

is a superb receiver out of the backfield. Can adjust to badly thrown balls.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks size and has durability concerns. Not a true power runner. Exposes himself to a lot of hard shots.

**Bottom line:** Westbrook is one of the NFL's most versatile backs. A surprisingly tough runner, he can grind out yards, and as a receiver he is a matchup nightmare. **Grade: 7.9**

## Thomas Tapeh, FB

**Strengths:** Has natural pass-catching ability. Solid in short-yardage and goal-line situations. Tough, and hits the hole with power.

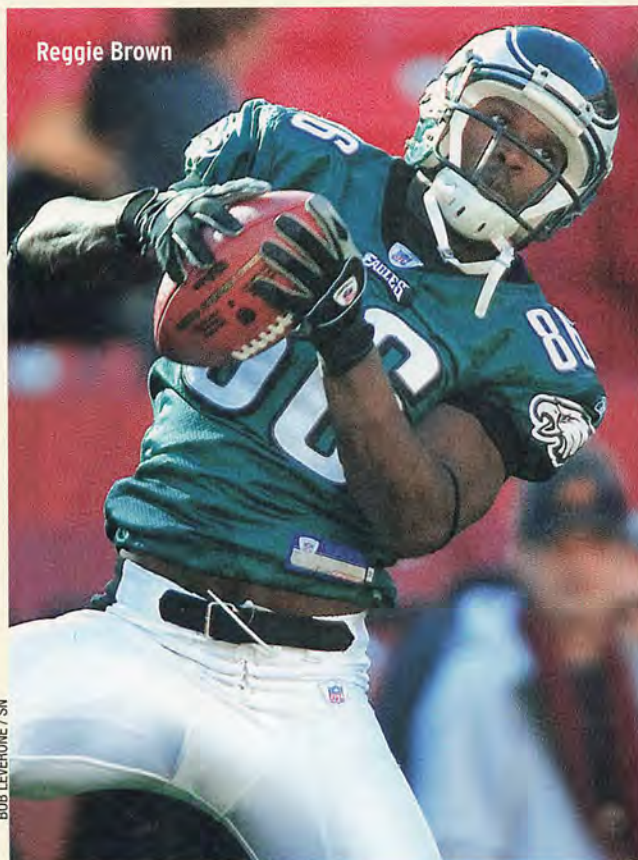
**Weaknesses:** A straight-line runner who won't make defenders miss. Has poor blocking technique and is not a great isolation blocker.

**Bottom line:** More a receiver than a runner, Tapeh plays a small but important role in the Eagles' attack. **Grade: 6.0**

## ► Reggie Brown, WR

**Strengths:** Has excellent speed and quickness. Has good hands; able to

Reggie Brown



BOB LEVERONE / SN

Players are graded by War Room scouts on a 1-10 scale.  
\*Rookies (not graded)

make the tough catch. Elusive with the ball in his hands and will make defenders miss. Has all the intangibles: great work ethic, mental toughness, intelligence.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal size and bulk. Must improve his blocking skills. Needs more game experience. Must improve recognition skills and develop the ability to consistently beat press coverage.

**Bottom line:** Brown suffered a bit of a sophomore slump in 2006 but still flashed the speed and skills to be a very good starter for years. **Grade: 7.8**

#### ↑ Kevin Curtis, WR

**Strengths:** A fast player with outstanding body control and hands. Makes acrobatic catches. Explosive in and out of breaks. Gets on top of the cornerback in a hurry. Plays with good awareness and understands routes.

**Weaknesses:** Marginal blocker who lacks ideal strength and size. Must use his quickness off the line to beat press coverage. Struggles to get into routes when defenders engage him.

**Bottom line:** With Philly, Curtis finally has his chance to be a starter and is on his way to being one of the game's better wide receivers. **Grade: 7.7**

#### L.J. Smith, TE

**Strengths:** Has outstanding quickness and great short-area burst. Explodes in and out of cuts. Runs excellent routes and is a factor in the vertical passing game. Has excellent hands and makes yards after the catch.

**Weaknesses:** Not powerful enough to hold up at the point of attack. Struggles as a blocker. Doesn't create big plays despite having the ability.

**Bottom line:** Smith is a good athlete who continues to grow each season as a tight end. He is the Eagles' go-to short-area player. **Grade: 7.6**

#### Jon Runyan, T

**Strengths:** A classic mauler. Excellent in short areas and dominant at the point of attack. Can ride ends past the pocket. Has excellent pop and explosiveness. Won't lose physical battles.

**Weaknesses:** Has limited athleticism and range. Struggles vs. athletic ends when he doesn't make initial contact.

**Bottom line:** Runyan is not an elite athlete, but he is a great lineman. He makes his blocks and plays the game

in an old-school fashion. **Grade: 7.9**

#### William Thomas, T

**Strengths:** An outstanding pass blocker. Has great size and gets tremendous separation with his arms. Does a good job of sliding with defenders and rides ends past the pocket. Can handle double moves and bull or speed rushes.

**Weaknesses:** Limited in space and lacks athleticism and speed. Struggles to pull and trap. A marginal run blocker.

**Bottom line:** Thomas uses his arm length and size to keep McNabb safe in the pocket. He's more of a grab-and-steer run blocker who simply makes his blocks. **Grade: 7.4**

#### ↑ Shawn Andrews, G

**Strengths:** Has great size and is an outstanding run blocker. Can dominate at the point of attack. Plays with strong hands to steer the defender and can clear out holes in short-yardage situations. Has a powerful lower body and good hip roll on contact.

**Weaknesses:** Struggles to make blocks on the second level. Has problems with one-gap inside penetrators.

**Bottom line:** Andrews took hold of the starting right guard position in 2005 and has played lights-out. He is on the rise. **Grade: 7.9**

#### Todd Herremans, G

**Strengths:** Has good bulk and the frame to get bigger. Can beat defenders to the point of attack. Uses his wide frame and long arms to force edge rushers wide. Good at picking up stunts and blitzes.

**Weaknesses:** Has limited lower-body strength. Plays with a narrow base and will end up on the ground. Struggles when pulling or having to adjust to quicker players in space.

**Bottom line:** Herremans is an emerging player who also can play tackle if needed. **Grade: 6.0**

#### Jamaal Jackson, C

**Strengths:** Has good short-area power and quickness. Moves well for a 330-pounder.

**Weaknesses:** Raw and has injury concerns. Must improve his technique.

**Bottom line:** Jackson became a full-time starter in 2006. His quickness and size have helped make him a productive player. **Grade: 6.4**

**KEY:** ↑ Ascending ↓ Descending

## INSIDERS POLL

What are the Eagles' chances of making the playoffs if Donovan McNabb gets hurt again?

25

No McNabb, no playoffs

They did it with Jeff Garcia—they could do it with A.J. Feeley

Heck, they won't make the playoffs WITH McNabb

5

2

Based on a poll of SN's 32 team correspondents

## BOLD PREDICTIONS

**1** RB Brian Westbrook, coming off his best and healthiest season as a pro, will gain more than 2,000 total yards as the offense becomes more committed to the running game.

**2** The defense won't be any better up front. The Eagles shuffled their linebackers to help a run defense that finished near the bottom of the NFL, but it's not going to matter much if the line isn't any better.

**3** TE L.J. Smith, in the final year of his contract, will have a Pro Bowl season and leave as a free agent afterward.

from tackle, where he had played his entire life. It took time for him to adjust, but by season's end Herremans was instrumental in the running game and was always a good pass protector.

Center Jamaal Jackson (6-4, 330) is a huge anchor for the line and important to the running game. What impressed coaches most was how, as a first-year starter, he was able to make all the line calls and keep the unit intact.

Winston Justice, who didn't dress for a game as a rookie, is the top backup tackle. Max Jean-Gilles and Scott Young will battle for the top backup guard spot. Young has a little more experience and might be stronger. Jean-Gilles (6-3, 358) has the girth to be excellent in the run game. Nick Cole is the backup center and also is used as an extra blocker out of the backfield in some goal-line situations. **GRADE: B+**

## DEFENSE

Coordinator Jim Johnson always has put more emphasis on pressuring the quarterback and forcing turnovers than he has on stopping the run. After the team fell to 26th in the league in run defense, that may have to change somewhat. Johnson still will preach pressure, but look for some run blitzes and stunts to be thrown in to help cover the deficiencies against the run.

**Line—**Jevon Kearse, who suffered a serious knee injury in Week 2, is expected back, but he is not the star he once was. His game is based on a quick first step and the ability to race around blockers. If he has lost any of that, he'll be a marginal player at best. If Kearse can't reclaim his starting left defensive end spot, it could go to Darren Howard, who moved there from the right side when Kearse went down. Howard wore down

over the season and eventually lost the job to Juqua Thomas.

Trent Cole has the pass-rush ability to start at right end. The problem with Cole is that he can wear down. He, more than anyone, needs the team's rotation system to work. Thomas, coming off a career year with six sacks, is the perfect backup for him. Rookie Victor Abiamiri, who is equally adept at stopping the run and rushing the passer, will join the rotation.

The Eagles need defensive tackles Mike Patterson and Brodrick Bunkley to play like first-round picks. Johnson likes his tackles to penetrate and create havoc while collapsing the pocket and allowing his hard-charging ends to get the sacks. Patterson has had his moments and seems like Johnson's kind of player. Bunkley certainly looks the part but did not practice well, so Johnson did not use him much in games. When he was on the field, he appeared to play too high, which made it easy for linemen to knock him off the ball against the run.

Ian Scott and Montae Reagor will rotate in at tackle. Scott is a tough run stopper and could push for a starting role. Reagor could provide some interior pass rush. **GRADE: C**

**Linebackers**—Veteran Jeremiah Trotter returns in the middle after a subpar season. He's still a factor against the run and makes big hits all over the field, but he needs protection from the tackles in front of him to be effective.

Takeo Spikes, acquired from Buffalo, could play any of the three positions, but it looks as though he'll start on the weak side. In his prime, Spikes was perfect for what Johnson likes to do—he diagnoses plays as well as anyone, goes to the ball quickly and can blitz and cover. However, an Achilles' tear in 2005 has taken away much of his effectiveness.

Chris Gocong, who spent his rookie season on injured reserve, was drafted to play the strong side after being a defensive end in college. He'll get another chance to win that job in training camp. If he falters, the team will move Spikes over or look at rookie Stewart Bradley, who provides size at 256 pounds but may need time to master Johnson's complex defense.

Omar Gaither took over on the weak side late last season and could reclaim that job if Spikes moves to the strong side. Gaither also could battle Trotter in the middle and definitely will be involved in the nickel. Gaither made some plays and was always around the ball last season. He made some mistakes, but they were typically the result of inexperience. **GRADE: C**

## SECRET WEAPON

### BRODRICK BUNKLEY, DT

When the Eagles selected Bunkley with the 14th overall pick in 2006, they felt they had a starter for the next 10 years. Bunkley is still waiting for that first start. The team needs him to live up to the hype and use his large frame to improve the run defense and create pressure inside. If he plays to his potential, he could be dangerous.

## SCOUTING REPORTS: DEFENSE

### ↓ Jevon Kearse, E

**Strengths:** Has outstanding first-step quickness and explosiveness. Stronger than his frame suggests. Does a great job of anticipating the snap count. Has excellent body lean and body control. Can adjust on the move. Uses his hands and arms well to gain separation. Solid against the run. Gets sacks on second and third efforts.

**Weaknesses:** Does not change direction well. A straight-line runner in space. Has durability concerns.

**Bottom line:** Kearse's lack of strength and change-of-direction ability are more apparent now that he is aging—and coming off a serious knee injury that cost him most of last season. **Grade: 7.2**

### ↑ Trent Cole, E

**Strengths:** Has great quickness and gets off the ball in a flash. Plays with great leverage and can get under the pads of blockers. Has a variety of pass-rush moves and is tough to block in one-on-one situations.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to improve his lower-body strength to hold up at the point of attack, especially vs. the double-team.

**Bottom line:** Cole has unique pass-rush ability and has been a productive starter. **Grade: 7.0**

### Mike Patterson, T

**Strengths:** Shows great initial burst, plays with leverage and has a nice array of moves. Once behind the line, has enough quickness to run down backs. Uses his hands well on blockers and is quick to shed with force.

**Weaknesses:** Doesn't have the speed to be a pass-rush threat. Lacks ideal height.

**Bottom line:** Patterson's performance dropped off a bit in 2006. He has the quickness to make plays in the backfield but must finish. **Grade: 7.4**

### Brodrick Bunkley, T

**Strengths:** Quick, athletic and active. A powerful tackler. Has a nose for the ball. Uses his leverage well when pass rushing. Shows a nice burst to close on the quarterback. Tall, with the frame to get bigger.

**Weaknesses:** Has durability concerns. Needs to get bigger and stronger. Lacks great speed; more bulk could

hurt his speed more.

**Bottom line:** With Darwin Walker gone, Bunkley gets the call in 2007, but he needs to be the disruptive force the Eagles sought when they drafted him in the first round last year. **Grade: 6.8**

### Takeo Spikes, LB

**Strengths:** Has good size and is a terrific athlete. Plays with abandon. Initial quickness, ability to diagnose plays and speed are outstanding. Takes great angles to the ballcarrier. Has excellent closing burst in pursuit and is tireless. Slaps blockers away. Tackling fundamentals are sound.

**Weaknesses:** Can be worn down. Prefers to play in space and gets frustrated when constantly fighting off blocks. Doesn't always play with leverage. Takes himself out of plays by overextending himself.

**Bottom line:** If Spikes can get healthy and stay healthy, he has the physical tools and natural ability to return to his spot as one of the top linebackers in the league. **Grade: 7.9**

### ↓ Jeremiah Trotter, LB

**Strengths:** An outstanding physical run stopper and tackler. Has a nonstop motor and plays with leverage. Excellent at the point of attack. Has good bulk and the upper-body strength to shed and stack vs. bigger blockers. Has elite football intelligence.

**Weaknesses:** Struggles in pass coverage against elite tight ends. Can get overaggressive.

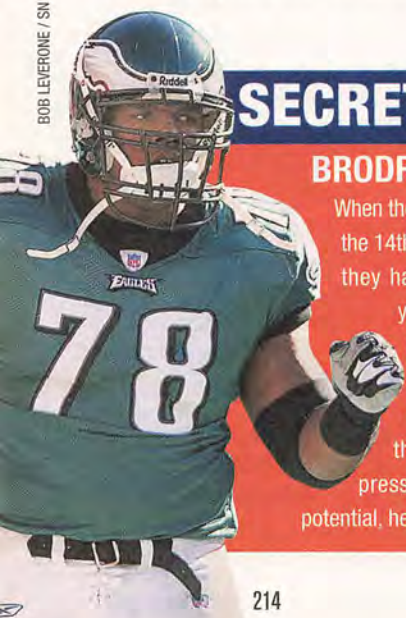
**Bottom line:** Trotter is one of the NFL's best run-stuffing linebackers and should wreak havoc on opposing runners. **Grade: 7.5**

### ↑ Chris Gocong, LB

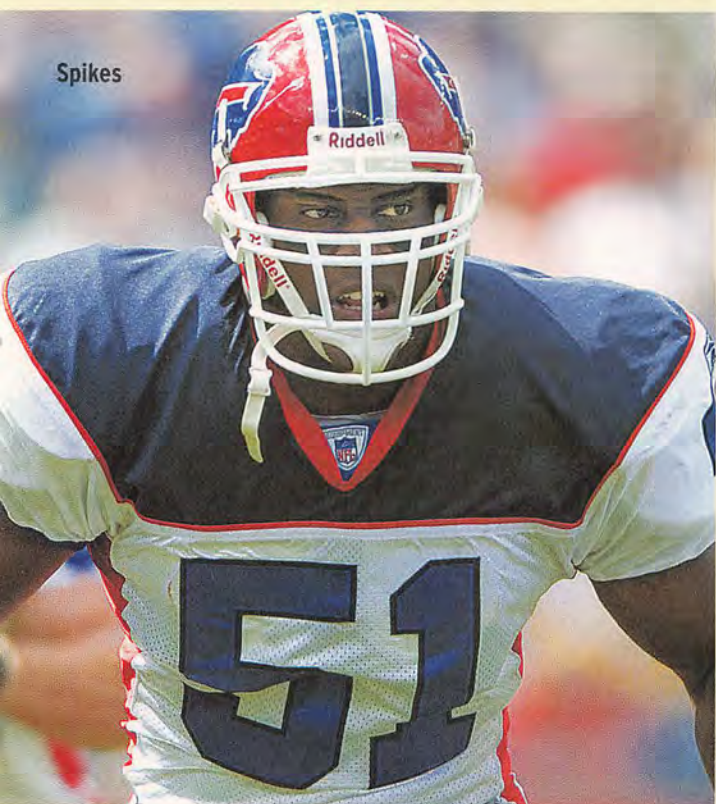
**Strengths:** A fiery, tenacious defender and strong tackler. Shows initial explosion at the point of attack, stays low and has a burst when turning the corner. Shows good run/pass recognition skills. Can sniff out screen passes and draw plays.

**Weaknesses:** Doesn't use his hands well to shed blockers. Lacks ideal size and upper-body strength to be an effective bull rusher.

**Bottom line:** Gocong missed the 2006 season with a neck injury but possesses the tools and passion to be a very good player if he can stay healthy. **Grade: 6.0**



Spikes



CJ GUNTHER FOR SN

### ↑ Sheldon Brown, CB

**Strengths:** A solid athlete who can turn and run. Plants and drives on the ball well and is outstanding when the ball is in the air. Doesn't waste motion and does a good job tracking passes. Has explosive short-area quickness and good recognition ability. Aggressive against the run. A solid tackler and excellent blitzer.

**Weaknesses:** Gambles to jump routes. Might struggle on an island vs. elite speed receivers.

**Bottom line:** Brown is a rising defensive star. He has the speed and athletic ability to run with any receiver and the ball skills to be a game-changer. **Grade: 7.9**

### Lito Sheppard, CB

**Strengths:** Does not waste motion. Good at tracking the ball in the air. Has good leaping ability; can go up and take the ball away from receivers. Has a great closing burst, good athleticism and natural receiving ability. A threat to return every pick for a touchdown.

**Weaknesses:** Struggles against the elite vertical receivers and takes too many chances in coverage. Must stay healthy.

**Bottom line:** Sheppard is a physical, aggressive player who plays smart to make up for a lack of elite deep speed. **Grade: 7.9**

### Brian Dawkins, S

**Strengths:** Has outstanding ball skills. Has excellent range and doesn't waste motion. Outstanding in zone coverage. Has great instincts. Can blitz but also can cover a tremendous amount of ground. An intimidating presence over the middle.

**Weaknesses:** More prone to injury with his advancing age. Could improve as a tackler. Willing in run support, but won't dominate as he does in pass defense.

**Bottom line:** Every team wants a Brian Dawkins anchoring its defense. **Grade: 8.5**

### ↑ Sean Considine, S

**Strengths:** A smart, versatile, hard-working prospect. Has benefited from learning from top-notch starters. Has an outstanding blend of speed, tackling skills, intelligence and toughness.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal athletic ability. **Bottom line:** Considine took over as a starter in 2006 and spent the offseason adding bulk. He isn't a great athlete, but he's smart and has play-making ability. **Grade: 6.5**

## KEY MOVES

### 2007 DRAFT PICKS

Rd.-Pick

GRADE **C**

#### 2-36 Kevin Kolb, QB, Houston

Has a strong, accurate arm. Played in a spread offense in college.

#### 2-57 Victor Abiamiri, DE, Notre Dame

Not a pure speed rusher; uses a bull rush to get to QBs.

#### 3-87 Stewart Bradley, LB, Nebraska

Moves well for his size. Can be used as a blitzer in zone coverage.

#### 3-90 Tony Hunt, RB, Penn State

Gets tough yards. Needs work as a receiver and blocker.

#### 5-159 C.J. Gaddis, DB, Clemson

Has good size (5-11, 206) and is strong in run support.

#### 5-162 Brent Celek, TE, Cincinnati

Could be a long-range answer, with L.J. Smith in final year of contract.

#### 6-201 Rashad Barksdale, CB, Albany

Could provide depth, but likely will land on practice squad.

#### 7-236 Nate Ilaoa, FB, Hawaii

Short (5-9, 245), powerful back will have to prove himself on special teams.

## VETERAN PLAYERS

**Additions:** WR Kevin Curtis (FA/Rams), QB Kelly Holcomb (trade/Bills), WR Bethel Johnson (FA/Vikings), DT Montae Reagor (FA/Colts), DT Ian Scott (FA/Bears), LB Takeo Spikes (trade/Bills).

**Losses:** LB Shawn Barber (FA/Texans), QB Jeff Garcia (FA/Buccaneers), Roderick Hood (FA/Cardinals), S Michael Lewis (FA/49ers), WR Donte Stallworth (FA/Patriots), DT Darwin Walker (trade/Bills).

**Secondary**—Starting cornerbacks Sheldon Brown and Lito Sheppard are similar in their coverage skills, size and willingness to come up and support the run. But Brown plays it a little safer, which means he does not come up with nearly as many big plays as Sheppard. Johnson will occasionally leave them in man coverage but gives them more help than he did in the past.

William James, formerly known as Will Peterson, will be the nickel back. James (6-0, 200) has better size than the starters, which could allow Johnson to match him up against bigger receivers on third down. Joselio Hanson, a good athlete with decent ball skills, is the No. 4 corner.

Brian Dawkins is versatile enough to play up in the box almost as an extra linebacker or in a deep cover zone. He even played linebacker in some nickel coverages. Dawkins can do whatever is needed, but Johnson must determine his role and that of the other safety, Sean Considine, who was caught up against the run too much last season.

Quintin Mikell is the top backup at both safety spots and is used in what Johnson calls his heavy packages, which come at the goal line or when the offense goes to three tight ends. **GRADE: B**

## SPECIAL TEAMS

For the first time since 1997, John Harbaugh will not run this unit. He will coach the secondary, and Rory Segrest will take over special teams. It's doubtful Segrest, who assisted Harbaugh last season, will alter any of the schemes or coverages, but he'll to add a wrinkle here or there just to make his mark.

Kicker David Akers has slipped a bit, but he's still among the top five in the league and is as good from long range and in the clutch as anyone. Punter Dirk Johnson, who started slowly but got better by the end of the season, will have competition from Australian Rules import Severio Rocca.

The kickoff return job is a wide-open battle between newly signed Bethel Johnson, who did a decent job in the past for New England and Minnesota, and Jeremy Bloom, who will be

first in line to return punts, as well. Bloom, a former Olympic skier, has not played football in three years and sat out last season with a hamstring injury. He was around the team, however, and learned the intricacies of the return game. Now he gets the chance to put that knowledge to

## STADIUM/MEDIA

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(67,594, grass)

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Training camp: Lehigh University,

Bethlehem, Pa.; 215-320-5160

Radio: WYSP-FM (94.1)

Website: philadelphiaeagles.com

work. **GRADE: C+**

## BOTTOM LINE

The offense needs to remain balanced between the pass and the run; for that to happen, Westbrook must get the ball more. On defense, the team must get production from Bunkley up front in order to improve against the run, and the linebackers need to produce some big plays to make Johnson's system work.

All told, there is enough talent on both sides of the ball for the Eagles to be in the mix for a playoff spot and perhaps win their fifth NFC East title in six years. **SN**

Mark Eckel covers the Eagles for Trenton (N.J.) Times.



Trotter

## PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE	DEFENSE
<b>QB</b> ▲ Donovan McNabb	<b>LE</b> ● Jevon Kearse
■ A.J. Feeley	● Darren Howard
<b>FB</b> ● Thomas Tapeh	<b>LT</b> ■ Mike Patterson
	● Montae Reagor
<b>RB</b> ▲ Brian Westbrook	<b>RT</b> ● Brodrick Bunkley
● Tony Hunt	● Ian Scott
<b>WR</b> ■ Reggie Brown	<b>RE</b> ■ Trent Cole
● Hank Baskett	● Juqua Thomas
<b>WR</b> ■ Kevin Curtis	<b>SLB</b> □ Chris Gocong
□ Jason Avant	□ Stewart Bradley
<b>TE</b> ■ L.J. Smith	<b>MLB</b> ■ Jeremiah Trotter
● Matt Schobel	● Omar Gaither
<b>LT</b> ■ William Thomas	<b>WLB</b> ● Takeo Spikes
□ Winston Justice	□ Matt McCoy
<b>LG</b> ● Todd Herremans	<b>LCB</b> ■ Lito Sheppard
□ Scott Young	● William James
<b>C</b> ● Jamaal Jackson	<b>SS</b> ● Sean Considine
□ Nick Cole	● Quintin Mikell
<b>RG</b> ▲ Shawn Andrews	<b>FS</b> ■ Brian Dawkins
□ Max Jean-Gilles	● C.J. Gaddis
<b>RT</b> ▲ Jon Runyan	<b>RCB</b> ■ Sheldon Brown
□ Pat McCoy	□ Joselio Hanson

## SPECIALISTS

<b>K</b> ■ David Akers	<b>KR</b> ● Bethel Johnson
<b>P</b> ● Dirk Johnson	<b>PR</b> ● Jeremy Bloom
	<b>LS</b> ● Jon Dorenbos

▲ Elite ■ Solid ● Adequate □ Fringe

Depth charts updated weekly at [sportingnews.com](http://sportingnews.com)

## EAGLES ROSTER

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL exp.	College	How acq.	2006 GP/GS
<b>QUARTERBACKS</b>							
14	A.J. Feeley	6-3/225	5/16/77	7	Oregon	FA/06	2/0
10	Kelly Holcomb	6-2/212	7/9/73	11	Middle Tennessee	T-Buf/07	0/0
4	Kevin Kolb	6-3/218	8/24/84	R	Houston	D2a/07	—
5	Donovan McNabb	6-2/240	11/25/76	9	Syracuse	D1/99	10/10
<b>RUNNING BACKS</b>							
28	Correll Buckhalter	6-0/222	10/6/78	7	Nebraska	D4/01	16/1
45	Jeremy Cain (FB/LS)	6-1/240	3/24/80	3	Massachusetts	FA/07	0/0
42	Jason Davis (FB)	5-10/240	11/2/83	2	Illinois	FA/06	0/0
29	Tony Hunt	6-1/233	11/24/85	R	Penn State	D3b/07	—
48	Nate Ilaoa (FB)	5-9/245	4/4/83	R	Hawaii	D7/07	—
23	Ryan Moats	5-8/210	12/17/82	3	Louisiana Tech	D3/05	8/0
38	Thomas Tapeh (FB)	6-1/243	3/28/80	4	Minnesota	D5/04	16/8
49	Zach Tuasosopo (FB)	6-2/245	12/19/81	1	Washington	FA/06	0/0
36	Brian Westbrook	5-10/205	9/2/79	6	Villanova	D3/02	15/14
<b>RECEIVERS</b>							
81	Jason Avant	6-0/209	4/20/83	2	Michigan	D4b/06	8/3
99	Mike Bartrum (TE)	6-4/245	6/23/70	14	Marshall	FA/00	11/0
84	Hank Baskett	6-4/220	9/4/82	2	New Mexico	T-Min/06	16/5
11	Jeremy Bloom	5-9/180	4/2/82	2	Colorado	D5a/06	0/0
86	Reggie Brown	6-1/197	1/13/81	3	Georgia	D2a/05	16/15
87	Brent Celek (TE)	6-4/261	1/25/85	R	Cincinnati	D5b/07	—
80	Kevin Curtis	5-11/186	7/17/78	5	Utah State	FA/07	16/1
19	Michael Gasperson	6-4/220	6/10/82	1	San Diego	FA/05	0/0
16	Bethel Johnson	5-11/200	2/11/79	5	Texas A&M	FA/07	11/2
83	Greg Lewis	6-0/180	2/12/80	5	Illinois	FA/03	16/3
13	Bill Sampsy	5-11/192	5/10/83	1	Louisiana-Lafayette	FA/06	0/0
89	Matt Schobel (TE)	6-5/257	11/4/78	6	TCU	FA/06	16/4
82	L.J. Smith (TE)	6-3/258	5/13/80	5	Rutgers	D2/03	16/15
85	Lee Vickers (TE)	6-6/270	3/13/81	1	North Alabama	FA/06	0/0
<b>OFFENSIVE LINEMEN</b>							
73	Shawn Andrews (G/T)	6-4/340	12/25/82	4	Arkansas	D1/04	16/16
59	Nick Cole (C)	6-0/350	7/28/84	2	New Mexico State	FA/06	16/0
46	Jon Dorenbos (LS)	6-0/245	7/21/80	5	Texas-El Paso	FA/06	6/0
79	Todd Herremans (G/T)	6-6/321	10/13/82	3	Saginaw Valley St.	D4b/05	16/16
67	Jamaal Jackson (G/C)	6-4/330	5/8/80	4	Delaware State	FA/03	16/16
62	Max Jean-Gilles (G)	6-3/358	11/19/83	2	Georgia	D4a/06	0/0
74	Winston Justice (T)	6-6/300	9/14/84	2	USC	D2/06	0/0
68	Pat McCoy (T)	6-5/328	12/14/80	2	West Texas A&M	FA/06	0/0
64	Stefan Rodgers (T)	6-4/305	11/3/81	2	Lambuth	FA/06	0/0
69	Jon Runyan (T)	6-7/330	11/27/73	12	Michigan	FA/00	16/16
72	William Thomas (T)	6-7/335	11/20/74	10	Florida State	D1/98	16/16
71	Scott Young (G)	6-4/312	7/15/81	3	Brigham Young	D5b/05	12/0
<b>DEFENSIVE LINEMEN</b>							
78	Victor Abiamiri (E)	6-4/267	1/14/86	R	Notre Dame	D2b/07	—
78	Brodrick Bunkley (T)	6-2/300	11/23/83	2	Florida State	D1/06	15/0
58	Trent Cole (E)	6-3/270	10/5/82	3	Cincinnati	D5a/05	16/14
90	Darren Howard (E)	6-3/275	11/19/76	8	Kansas State	FA/06	16/16
93	Jevon Kearse (E)	6-4/265	9/3/76	9	Florida	FA/04	2/2
95	Jerome McDougle (E)	6-2/264	12/15/78	5	Miami	D1/03	14/0
98	Mike Patterson (T)	6-0/292	9/1/83	3	USC	D1/05	16/16
77	LaJuan Ramsey (T)	6-3/291	3/19/84	2	USC	D6/06	6/0
91	Sam Rayburn (T)	6-3/303	10/20/80	5	Tulsa	FA/03	11/0
94	Montae Reagor (T)	6-3/285	6/29/77	9	Texas Tech	FA/07	5/5
91	Ian Scott (T)	6-3/302	11/8/81	5	Florida	D4b/03	15/7
75	Juqua Thomas (E)	6-2/250	5/15/78	7	Oklahoma State	FA/05	16/1
<b>LINEBACKERS</b>							
55	Stewart Bradley	6-3/256	11/2/83	R	Nebraska	D3a/07	—
50	Torrance Daniels	6-3/248	12/27/81	2	Harding	FA/06	6/0
96	Omar Gaither	6-1/233	3/18/84	2	Tennessee	D5b/06	16/5
57	Chris Gocong (LB/E)	6-2/263	11/16/83	2	Cal Poly	D3/06	0/0
51	Matt McCoy	5-11/230	10/14/82	3	San Diego State	D2b/05	15/10
53	Dedrick Roper	6-2/245	7/31/81	3	Northwood	FA/05	8/0
51	Takeo Spikes	6-2/242	12/17/76	10	Auburn	T-Buf/07	12/11
54	Jeremiah Trotter	6-1/262	1/20/77	10	Stephen F. Austin	FA/02	16/16
<b>DEFENSIVE BACKS</b>							
31	Rashad Barksdale (CB)	5-11/208	5/11/84	R	Albany	D6/07	—
24	Sheldon Brown (CB)	5-10/200	3/19/79	6	South Carolina	D2b/02	16/16
37	Sean Considine (S)	6-0/212	10/28/81	3	Iowa	D4a/05	16/9
20	Brian Dawkins (S)	6-0/210	10/13/73	12	Clemson	D2b/96	16/16
25	Dustin Fox (CB)	5-11/200	10/8/82	2	Ohio State	FA/06	1/0
30	C.J. Gaddis (CB)	5-11/206	8/12/85	R	Clemson	D5a/07	—
22	Joselio Hanson (CB)	5-9/185	8/13/81	3	Texas Tech	FA/06	16/1
21	William James (CB)	6-0/200	6/15/79	7	Western Illinois	FA/06	3/0
27	Quintin Mikell (S)	5-10/206	9/16/80	5	Boise State	FA/03	16/1
26	Lito Sheppard (CB)	5-10/194	4/8/81	6	Florida	D1/02	13/13
<b>SPECIALISTS</b>							
2	David Akers (K)	5-10/200	12/9/74	9	Louisville	FA/99	16/0
8	Dirk Johnson (P)	6-0/205	6/1/75	5	Northern Colorado	FA/03	16/0

Abbreviations: D1-draft pick, first round; W-claimed on waivers; T-obtained in trade; FA-free-agent acquisition.



# RAMS

**The offense looks even better, but the defense looks largely the same—and that's not a good thing**

**SN PICK** 3rd, NFC West (7-9)

By JIM THOMAS

In his rookie year as an NFL head coach, Scott Linehan had an offense that was good enough to win 10 games and a defense good enough to win six. The Rams split the difference and finished 8-8. So entering the offseason, the team's top three needs were clear: defense, defense and defense.

It was with much surprise, then, that the most expensive acquisitions were a wide receiver (Drew Bennett) and a tight end (Randy McMichael). Apparently, Linehan's blueprint calls for winning a lot of 40-30 games.

Though these Rams lack the quick-strike ability of Greatest Show on Turf teams of 1999-2001, this attack should be almost

as tough to defend. No offense in the league can boast as many proven options in the passing game. If Steven Jackson runs like he did last year—when he became a bona fide star—and a young line keeps quarterback Marc Bulger healthy, the potential is there to score many, many points.

Alas, the Rams may need every last one unless there's dramatic improvement on defense and special teams.

## OFFENSE

One of the best moves Linehan made in '06 was to pass play-calling duties to coordinator Greg Olson after a shutout loss to Carolina. The offense jelled under Olson, and the Rams averaged 28 points in the final six games—four of which they won. Olson shows the patience to stick with the running game even if it starts slowly. The Rams will feature a versatile attack that can play smash-mouth with Jackson or throw downfield to Torrey Holt, Isaac Bruce and Drew Bennett.

**Quarterbacks**—Under Linehan, Marc Bulger reinvented his game. His interceptions were greatly reduced in '06; his checkdown throws were way up.

At 30, Bulger is just hitting his prime. He still will take some shots downfield in this offense, but he doesn't take as many chances. One of Bulger's biggest challenges will be getting everybody involved—he now has five receivers who caught 46 or more passes last season.

## SCHEDULE

All times Eastern

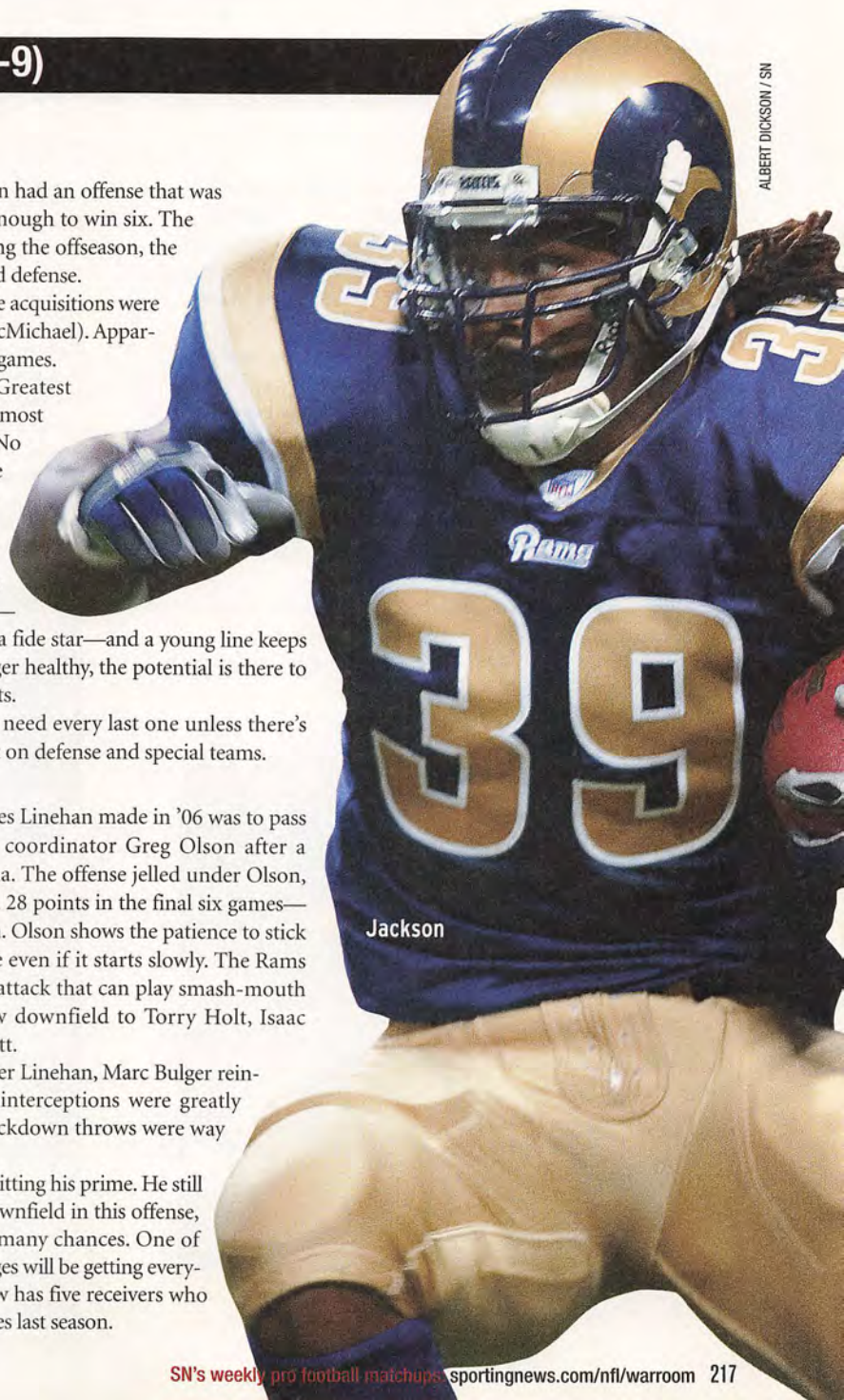
Sept. 9	CAROLINA	1:00
Sept. 16	SAN FRANCISCO	1:00
Sept. 23	at Tampa Bay	1:00
Sept. 30	at Dallas	1:00
Oct. 7	ARIZONA	1:00
Oct. 14	at Baltimore	1:00
Oct. 21	at Seattle	4:15
Oct. 28	CLEVELAND	1:00
Nov. 4	Open date	
Nov. 11	at New Orleans	1:00
Nov. 18	at San Francisco	4:15
Nov. 25	SEATTLE	1:00
Dec. 2	ATLANTA	1:00
Dec. 9	at Cincinnati	1:00
Dec. 16	GREEN BAY	1:00
Dec. 20	PITTSBURGH†	8:15
Dec. 30	at Arizona	4:15

Strength of schedule: T-27th

†Thursday

Analysis of every Rams game:  
sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom

## REGULAR-SEASON WINS



ALBERT DICKSON / SN

Jackson



Bulger's accuracy is excellent, and he deserves to be mentioned among the NFL's best. One area Bulger still needs to improve: red zone proficiency.

Backup Gus Frerotte knows this offense; he has played for Linehan the past four seasons—in Minnesota, then Miami and now St. Louis. Although not nearly as accurate as Bulger, Frerotte probably has a stronger arm and can get the team through a couple of games should Bulger go down.

No. 3 Ryan Fitzpatrick is bright and tough and has a year in this offense under his belt. **GRADE: A-**

**Running backs**—Jackson is coming off a breakthrough campaign. Can he do it again? Actually, Linehan would like Jackson to do a little less after he piled up 436 touches, including 90 receptions. Jackson improved as an inside runner, squaring his pads and grinding out yards after contact. He cut down on lost-yardage plays caused by drifting sideways in search of the home run. Jackson also has developed into a very effective receiving back, mainly on screens and dump-offs, which he can turn into big plays because of his elusiveness and ability to break tackles.

Rookie Brian Leonard will give Jackson a breather from time to time, occasionally will serve as the lead blocker at fullback—where he played his senior season at Rutgers—and will be used as a receiver out of the backfield. Leonard could be on the field a lot. Newcomer Travis Minor can carry the ball in a crunch, but his main value is on special teams.

At fullback, Madison Hedgecock has a big frame and gets good initial contact as a lead blocker. But he needs to do a better job maintaining that contact and to be more effective blocking in space. **GRADE: B+**

**Receivers**—Holt and Bruce remain focal points of the offense. Holt has been the NFL's most productive receiver this decade and continues to be an outstanding route runner. Bruce has lost a step from his prime but still manages to get downfield and make key plays.

For years, the Rams have relied on smaller, quicker receivers, but the departure of Kevin Curtis and the addition of the 6-5 Bennett signify a change of emphasis. Look for Bennett to excel

## SCOUTING REPORTS: OFFENSE

### Marc Bulger, QB

**Strengths:** Great anticipation and touch. Poised and tough. Compact throwing motion. Does a good job leading his receivers and putting the ball where only they can make the play. Good with fade routes in the red zone.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks arm strength. Takes too many hits, and durability is something of a concern.

**Bottom line:** Bulger is smart, competitive and accurate. After some growing pains, he excelled in Scott Linehan's system, which emphasizes shorter routes and getting the ball out quickly. That helped him stay healthy and make the Pro Bowl. **Grade: 8.6**

### ↑ Steven Jackson, RB

**Strengths:** Has size, speed and power. Can turn the corner and exploit cut-back lanes. Runs by some defenders and over others. Can carry a heavy workload and wear down defenses. Picks up tough yards and anchors in pass protection.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to run with more patience and leverage. Occasionally fumbles when fighting for extra yards.

**Bottom line:** Jackson emerged last season as one of the most complete backs in the NFL. He is a dominant runner and a highly productive

receiver. **Grade: 9.0**

### Torry Holt, WR

**Strengths:** Has great hands, good speed and initial quickness. Gets clean releases against press coverage and finds soft spots against zone coverage. Sets up defenders and explodes out of his cuts. Adjusts to passes away from his body and can haul in difficult catches on sideline routes. Reads defenses well.

**Weaknesses:** Occasionally gets muscled off his route and takes his eyes off the ball to find the defender. Doesn't sustain blocks.

**Bottom line:** Holt is a tough matchup for any corner. His production and value never seem to drop. **Grade: 9.3**

### ↓ Isaac Bruce, WR

**Strengths:** Smooth and experienced. Uses savvy and quick feet to get clean releases against press coverage. Runs excellent routes and shows great body control. Adjusts to throws over his shoulders. Reads defenses, finds soft spots in zones and adjusts his routes when he reads blitz. Competitive and intense. Looks to block downfield.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks a second gear to separate on vertical routes. Hits the deck instead of fighting for extra

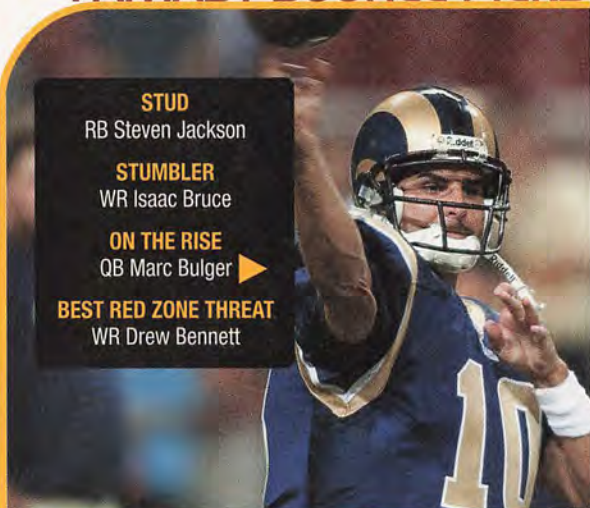
## FANTASY SOURCE PICKS

**STUD**  
RB Steven Jackson

**STUMBLER**  
WR Isaac Bruce

**ON THE RISE**  
QB Marc Bulger ▶

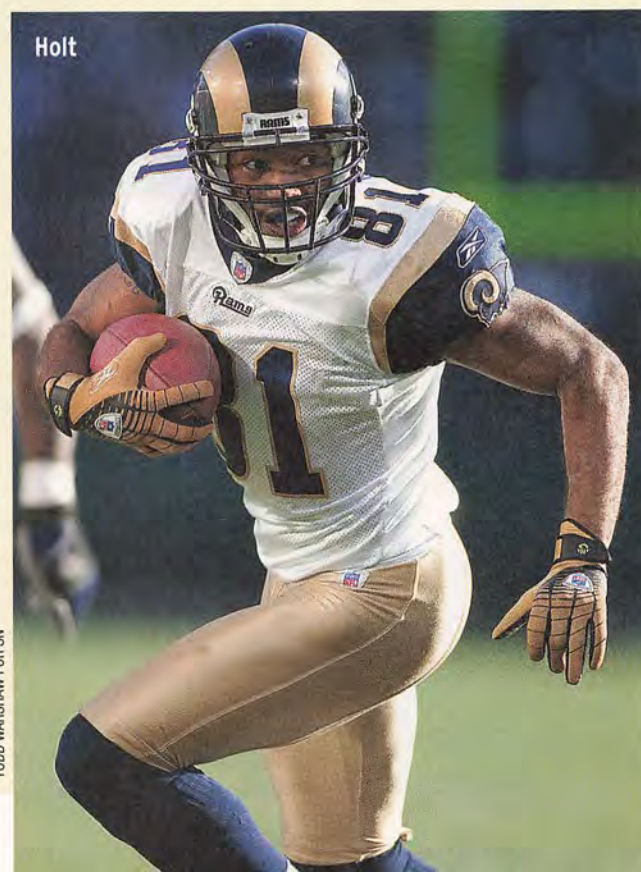
**BEST RED ZONE THREAT**  
WR Drew Bennett



Fantasy Source Football is your online fantasy authority.  
Go to [fantasy.sportingnews.com/nfl](http://fantasy.sportingnews.com/nfl).

ALBERT DICKSON / SN

Holt



TODD WARSHAW FOR SN

Players are graded by War Room scouts on a 1-10 scale.  
\*Rookies (not graded)

yards. Occasionally turns upfield before securing the catch.

**Bottom line:** He no longer has the explosiveness that once made him great, and he isn't the scoring threat he used to be. He still is productive but is fighting time. **Grade: 7.1**

### Drew Bennett, WR

**Strengths:** Has excellent size and gives great effort. Makes tough catches in traffic and can find open areas in zone coverage. Has excellent hands; makes tough catches look easy. A great downfield blocker. Runs precise routes and has deceptive deep speed.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks quickness off the snap and the moves to make defenders miss. Doesn't show a burst coming in and out of his routes.

**Bottom line:** Bennett initially will work as the slot receiver in St. Louis, where he'll use his size to create mismatches in the middle of the field. Eventually, he could replace Isaac Bruce in the lineup. **Grade: 7.0**

### Randy McMichael, TE

**Strengths:** One of the best receivers among tight ends. Takes good angles and uses good leverage as a blocker. Shows quickness and change-of-direction skills. Too fast for linebackers and too big for defensive backs in man coverage. Has big, soft hands and is a top vertical threat among tight ends.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks bulk and strength. Gives an inconsistent effort and drops too many balls. Has had off-field issues.

**Bottom line:** McMichael could play a big role in the Rams' offense as a presence in the middle of the field. **Grade: 7.9**

### Orlando Pace, T

**Strengths:** Has a rare combination of size, power and athleticism. Shows good initial punch, plays with leverage and consistently gets movement at the point of attack. Can block moving targets at the second level. Sets quickly and has the lateral mobility to handle double moves. Uses his long arms to ride defenders past the pocket.

**Weaknesses:** Gets complacent against weaker competition. Occasionally takes poor angles on downfield blocks. Has had a few injuries.

**Bottom line:** Pace is an elite left tack-

le who keeps his quarterback from getting hit. **Grade: 9.0**

### ↑ Alex Barron, T

**Strengths:** Massive but still athletic. Shows good initial burst and terrific footwork. Quick enough to take on fast edge rushers. Has long arms. Fluid on the move.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to improve his overall body strength. Can be pushed into the pocket when he misses pass rushers with his hands. Gets way too many false start penalties.

**Bottom line:** Barron is a solid run blocker who will continue to get better. **Grade: 7.5**

### Richie Incognito, G

**Strengths:** Has great strength and mobility. Plays with a mean streak.

**Weaknesses:** His inability to control his emotions is a major concern. Has had injury and off-field issues.

**Bottom line:** Incognito has excellent physical tools and a good motor, but he must improve his technique and play under control before he can become a reliable starter. **Grade: 6.0**

### Mark Setterstrom, G

**Strengths:** Strong upper body. Takes great angles toward defenders and strikes hard. Sets quickly in pass protection. Picks up blitzes and changes direction well. Shows good athleticism and upside.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks explosiveness. Must improve overall technique. Struggles to hold his ground against bull rushers.

**Bottom line:** Setterstrom is an athletic lineman who has improved his bulk and strength. He took hold of a starting spot on the left side late in '06 and likely will be there for some time. **Grade: 6.0**

### Brett Romberg, C

**Strengths:** Tough. Plays smart and takes good angles. Has good footwork and plays with proper technique. Shuffles well laterally and works to stay square. Good blocking at the second level.

**Weaknesses:** Does not have the strength to block a power rusher one-on-one.

**Bottom line:** Romberg is a tough, high-effort player who will get a chance to anchor the line in '07. **Grade: 5.0**

**KEY:** ↑ Ascending ↓ Descending

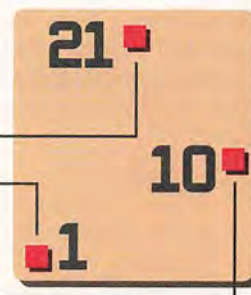
## INSIDERS POLL

### The Rams' run defense will:

Move toward respectability

Soon become a team strength

Still be a joke



Based on a poll of SN's 32 team correspondents

## BOLD PREDICTIONS

**1** RG Richie Incognito once again will rank near the top of the league in unnecessary roughness penalties. He—slowly—is maturing, but it's hard for a hothead to change his stripes.

**2** LE Leonard Little will register double-digit sacks for the fifth time. Once again, he will earn every one of them because the pass rush around him has been improved only marginally.

**3** By Thanksgiving, Randy McMichael will top the 27 receptions Rams tight ends combined for in 2006. He will provide a red zone and third-down threat lacking for years in St. Louis.

at working the middle against cover 2 schemes. He and McMichael will help productivity in the red zone, a problem in recent years. McMichael has averaged 65 catches the past three seasons, and his blocking ability will pay dividends. Linehan likes to use three-receiver and two-tight end sets, so Bennett and McMichael will be on the field a lot.

With McMichael around, tight end Joe Klopfenstein will have the freedom to move around—in motion and in the backfield. That's probably what he does best rather than pounding it out on the line.

Though Dante Hall was acquired primarily for his return ability, he also figures to get some time at receiver, and the team would like to get the ball in his hands a couple of times a game.

### GRADE: A-

**Line**—Line coach Paul Boudreau stresses power and attitude as much as technique. Right guard Richie Incognito, and to a lesser extent center Brett Romberg and left guard Mark Setterstrom, fit this old-school approach.

Incognito sometimes hurts the Rams with hotheaded play, but he packs a wallop coming off the line. Romberg and Setterstrom aren't as powerful but, like Incognito, they are tenacious, tough blockers. At this stage of their careers, all three are better run blockers than pass protectors.

On the flanks are 6-7 tackles Orlando Pace and Alex Barron. Pace's string of seven straight Pro Bowl berths came to an end because of a torn left triceps muscle that sidelined him for the final seven games. He remains one of the game's best pass blockers and a strong run blocker. Barron is athletic but needs to cut down on false starts and work on anchoring better against the bull rush.

Todd Steussie played surprisingly well last season at age 35, and returns as the No. 3 tackle. Andy McCollum will challenge



Romberg for the center job. McCollum is physical and smart, but he is 37 and coming off major knee surgery.

Backup guard Claude Terrell once showed promise as a run blocker, but injury problems have caused his stock to drop. Also in the backup mix are guard Adam Goldberg, who is quick and agile, and tackle Drew Stojny, who has no NFL experience.

**GRADE: C+**

## DEFENSE

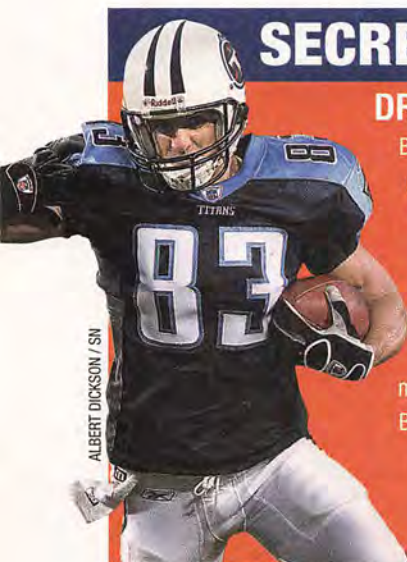
Coordinator Jim Haslett likes to give opponents multiple looks and be unpredictable. He also isn't afraid to bring the blitz. The problem is this scheme requires highly skilled players who can think and react quickly and are just plain quick. The '06 Rams were about two or three players short of making the scheme work effectively—and it doesn't look like they made many upgrades. As a result, they will be depending on several young players to make the leap from question marks to solid starters.

**Line**—The weak link a year ago, this unit must show dramatic improvement if the Rams hope to compete for a playoff spot. The Rams ranked 31st in run defense last season, and the line lacked an effective inside run stuffer.

Left end Leonard Little remains one of the league's top pass rushers and holds his own against the run. But the lack of a complementary pass rusher has caused Little to face a heavy dose of double-teams and chip blocks. The Rams hope former Lions right end James Hall, acquired in a trade, will have enough pass-rush juice to ease the attention on Little. Hall must display more consistency than he did in Detroit.

Backup Victor Adeyanju isn't much of a pass rusher, but is a high-effort player against the run. End Eric Moore played a little down the stretch after joining the team last season but has yet to distinguish himself.

At tackle, La'Roi Glover plays with heart, remains a leader and can still get into the backfield. But he's not the force he once was, and would be more effective if he played fewer snaps. The other starter likely will be first-round pick Adam Carriker. Though Carriker played primarily end in college, he has the size and strength to be a good fit in the interior of the 4-3. Stopping the run is his forte.



**SECRET WEAPON**

**DREW BENNETT, WR**

Bennett won't catch as many passes as he did in Tennessee, but he will provide a big target and playmaking ability from the slot, which will make the Rams better equipped to attack the middle of cover 2 defenses. Bennett is capable of making opponents pay for double-teaming Torry Holt or Isaac Bruce on the outside.

ALBERT DICKSON / SN

## SCOUTING REPORTS: DEFENSE

### Leonard Little, E

**Strengths:** Has good instincts; anticipates snap counts. Strong, plays with intensity and can shed blocks quickly. Gets through traffic and has sideline-to-sideline range. Consistently turns the corner and make plays. Adept at knocking the ball loose. Shows good rip and swim moves.

**Weaknesses:** Wears down when teams run at him. Lacks power, has a narrow base and doesn't play with great leverage. Can be overaggressive upfield and run himself out of plays.

**Bottom line:** Little lacks ideal bulk, but he is disruptive and always around the ball. He is the top playmaker on the Rams' defense. **Grade: 8.0**

### James Hall, E

**Strengths:** Tough and active. Has excellent initial quickness and anticipation skills. Changes direction well. Plays with leverage and has lots of double moves. A powerful hitter who is relentless in space and in pursuit.

**Weaknesses:** Struggles to hold his ground and can be engulfed. Runs around blocks and takes himself out of position. Lacks power and ideal speed as a pass rusher. Tends to wear down.

**Bottom line:** Hall is not pretty, but he makes plays and will take pressure off Little. **Grade: 7.2**

### La'Roi Glover, T

**Strengths:** Anticipates the snap. Has an explosive first step and disrupts plays in backfield. Forces backs to stretch runs outside. A powerful open-field tackler who forces fumbles.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks bulk. Can't beat double-teams consistently. Lacks height, has problems locating the ball and gets out of position.

**Bottom line:** Glover is a consummate pro who understands his role. He still has value because of his effort and ability to rush the passer. **Grade: 7.6**

### Jimmy Kennedy, T

**Strengths:** Has excellent size and good power. Knocks back linemen and maintains separation. Can collapse the pocket. Has a quick first step and runs well. Will tip passes.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks recognition skills and discipline. Has poor footwork and leverage. Lacks pass-rush moves and closing burst. Conditioning, stamina and durability are concerns.

**Bottom line:** Kennedy possesses great

physical tools but has been a disappointment. He must be more consistent to keep starting. **Grade: 6.5**

### \*Adam Carriker, T

**Strengths:** Tough and competitive. Plays with his knees bent and uses his hands to lock on to blockers. Gets arm extension and holds his ground at the point of attack. Works hard to make tackles downfield.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks explosiveness off the snap. Doesn't redirect quickly. His height hinders his ability to get low and shed blockers. Bites on play-action fakes.

**Bottom line:** Carriker will try to make the transition from college end to NFL tackle. The Rams need run-stuffing help and expect him to make an immediate impact.

### Will Witherspoon, LB

**Strengths:** Reads plays quickly and rarely takes false steps. Can disrupt plays in the backfield, takes good angles to the ball and closes cutback lanes. Has a nonstop motor and the range to make plays in pursuit. Can make plays from sideline to sideline and is a reliable open-field tackler.

**Weaknesses:** Undersized; can be engulfed. A liability in short-yardage situations. Takes too long to shed blocks. Plays too high.

**Bottom line:** Witherspoon is quick and instinctive and rarely makes mistakes. He plays with a great motor and is versatile enough to play inside or outside. **Grade: 8.0**

### Pisa Tinoisamoa, LB

**Strengths:** Fast and aggressive. Reads plays quickly and beats blockers to a spot. Shows good range and can make plays in the backfield. Explodes into hits and forces fumbles. Has good range in zone coverage and is athletic enough to excel in man coverage.

**Weaknesses:** Undersized and plays with poor technique. Can be engulfed. Takes poor angles and creates running lanes by avoiding blocks.

**Bottom line:** Tinoisamoa is explosive, but he was not very productive when





healthy in 2006 and must be more disciplined. **Grade: 7.8**

### Brandon Chillar, LB

**Strengths:** Has good size, is strong and anticipates well. Rarely takes false steps and can beat blockers to the point of attack. Takes good angles, gets through traffic and pursues hard.  
**Weaknesses:** Struggles in man-to-

their routes. Great in press coverage. Uses hands well to shed blockers. Plays with a mean streak.

**Weaknesses:** Shows poor jam technique. Has difficulty with angles in run support and misses tackles. Has no second gear and lacks the athletic ability to run downfield in man coverage.

**Bottom line:** Brown is a tough, physical corner who fits well in Jim



Little

man coverage. Does not shoot gaps or blitz effectively. Needs to improve leverage and use of his hands.

**Bottom line:** Chillar lacks the quickness and leverage to start on a long-term basis. **Grade: 6.3**

### ↑Tye Hill, CB

**Strengths:** Has blazing speed. Shows good awareness and instincts in zone coverage and excels in bump-and-run. Smooth and fluid and can turn and run with the fastest receivers. Gets a quick jump on passes in front of him. Tough, physical and aggressive. Has terrific leaping ability.

**Weaknesses:** Must improve technique. Doesn't have good read-and-react skills. Lack of size and bulk hurts him in run support.

**Bottom line:** Hill is an extremely athletic player with the skills to develop into a top-tier playmaker. **Grade: 7.6**

### Fakhir Brown, CB

**Strengths:** Physical. Has good size and strength and can muscle receivers off

Haslett's defense. **Grade: 7.5**

### Corey Chavous, S

**Strengths:** Experienced and versatile. Diagnoses plays quickly and takes excellent angles. Closes quickly and flashes tackling pop. Physical and aggressive in man-to-man.

**Weaknesses:** Undersized and on the downside of his career. Stiff covering quick slot receivers. Lacks recovery speed and has lost burst to the ball.

**Bottom line:** Chavous can line up all over and is productive in run support. His big-play production has slipped, but he remains a solid starter and a leader. **Grade: 7.2**

### O.J. Atogwe, S

**Strengths:** His best asset is as a run stopper. Tough; plays mean. Shows flashes of being a playmaker.

**Weaknesses:** Has limited range. Struggles in zone coverage.

**Bottom line:** Atogwe is a solid run defender who can be a liability in coverage. He shouldn't be a starter. **Grade: 5.9**

## SCOUT TAKES

### A scout from another team sizes up the Rams

**Steven Jackson** has become their offensive centerpiece. He's a big body with deceptive athleticism and deceptive speed. As long as they continue to use him in the right situations, he'll be one of the best backs in the league. ... Cornerback is not a strong position for them. If they're going to play cover 2, that might give them a little better chance. But if they're going to play a lot of man, they're going to struggle because of their lack of size. ... **Drew Bennett** and **Randy McMichael** give them weapons to be more productive in the red zone. Bennett is tall, has excellent hands and runs nice routes. You like the mismatches he can create. McMichael has always been a talented receiver. ... **Adam Carriker** is athletic and moves well. Even though he's around 300 pounds, he conceivably could be a 310-pound guy and be a pretty stout run stopper.



BOB LEVERONE / SN

Jimmy Kennedy looks like a run-stuffing nose tackle, but he didn't play the part a year ago. A broken hand was partly to blame. Kennedy will have to show significant improvement to beat out Carriker. Claude Wroten has the ability to collapse the pocket, but he wasn't a factor as a rookie and it might be overly optimistic to expect much from him. **GRADE: C-**

**Linebackers**—At their best, middle linebacker Will Witherspoon and weakside linebacker Pisa Tinoisamoa fly to the ball and make plays sideline to sideline. Both, however, are undersized and prone to getting smothered by 320-pound blockers. Tinoisamoa plays with passion, but he had enough injuries last season to fill out a medical textbook. Witherspoon has excellent coverage skills and was a difference-maker before wearing down.

On the strong side, Brandon Chillar doesn't provide many big plays, but he has improved and now is at least a solid contributor in the base defense. He will be pushed by Chris Draft, who led Carolina in tackles a year ago and has pass-rush ability. Draft can play all three positions.

Jon Alston, who spent most of his rookie season on the bench, will back up Tinoisamoa on the weak side. Alston is undersized but has good speed, which should serve him well as a situational pass rusher. Tim McGarigle, a 2006 seventh-round draft pick, is limited athletically but could give Witherspoon a break from time to time. **GRADE: C**

**Secondary**—This unit improved steadily down the stretch but still has a ways to go. In a scheme that calls for a lot of man coverage, young players Tye Hill, Ron Bartell and O.J. Atogwe have playmaking skills that need to be honed. For this unit to take the next step, it needs to show significant improvement in tackling, particularly in run support.

At cornerback, the feisty Hill plays bigger than his size (5-10, 185) but still gets victimized occasionally by big receivers. He and Fakhir Brown, the other starter, have adequate to good



coverage skills. The X-factor is Bartell, a raw talent who has size (6-1, 200), speed and athleticism. He made big plays down the stretch as the nickel back.

The club signed veterans Mike Rumph and Lenny Walls with the hope at least one clicks as a backup. Both bring much-needed size but also injury histories. The team also drafted speedy Jonathan Wade, who needs to improve his technique and tackling.

At strong safety, Corey Chavous is a solid all-around player but, more important, a big-time leader. The young players in the secondary look up to him. Atogwe, the free safety, had some growing pains a year ago, particularly early, but looks like an emerging player. Newcomer Todd Johnson has run-support skills when he moves up in the box and will be a core special teams player. Free safety Jerome Carter has yet to distinguish himself as anything more than a backup in his two seasons in the league. **GRADE: C**

## SPECIAL TEAMS

Shoddy coverage units, a comatose return game and, more

often than not, substandard punting have caused the special teams to be an albatross for years. New special teams coach Al Roberts, out of the NFL since 2002 and coaching high school football in recent years, brings energy and motivational skills to his new position. Roberts will stress fundamentals, and has a track

record for producing good return units.

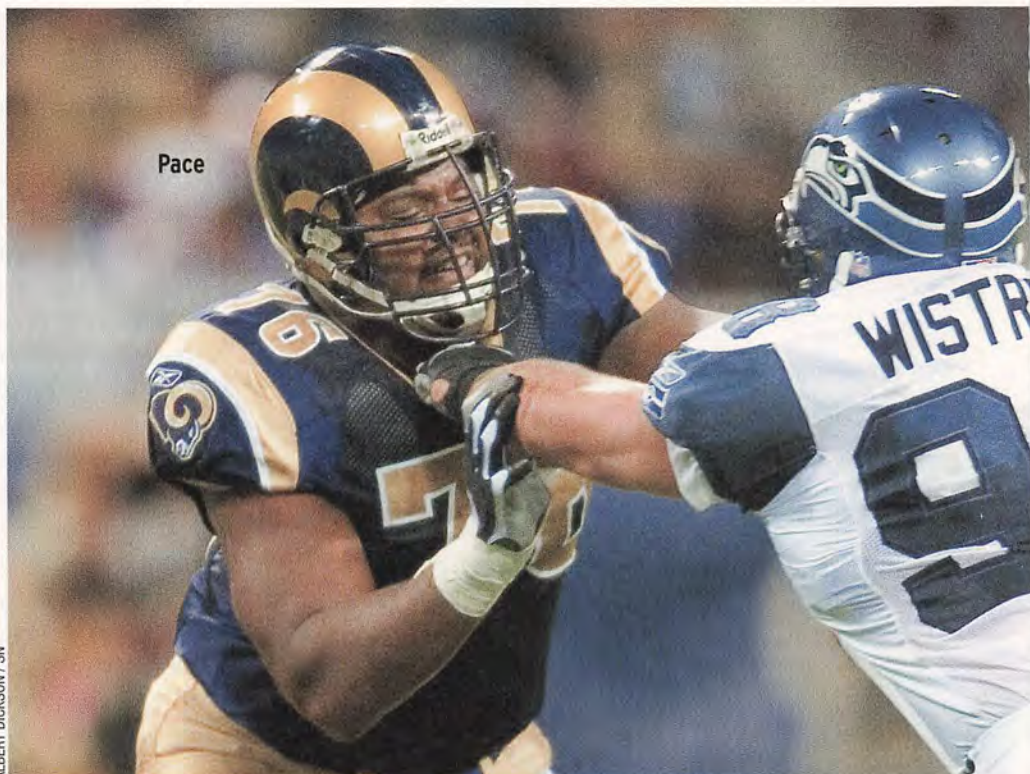
Year after year, the saving grace for the special teams is kicker Jeff Wilkins, who is accurate and has a strong leg. Donnie Jones replaces Matt Turk at punter. Jones has a strong left leg and has better touch and directional skills than advertised.

Hall's production as a return man has fallen off from his peak years with the Chiefs in 2002-04, but he still should provide an upgrade, perhaps a significant one. The hope is a change of scenery—and the chance to play his home games on turf—will rejuvenate Hall. **GRADE: C-**

## BOTTOM LINE

There's no question the offense will be better—and it was pretty good in '06. But the same can't be said about a defense that has only one sure difference-maker in Little. It's difficult to see the Rams faring much better in Linehan's second season, particularly against a schedule that looks tougher than the '06 version. Look for the team to finish in the 8-8 neighborhood again. **SN**

*Jim Thomas covers the Rams for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.*



Pace

ALBERT DICKSON / SN

## KEY MOVES

### 2007 DRAFT PICKS

Rd.-Pick

**GRADE C-**

**1-13 Adam Carriker, DT, Nebraska**

No matter where he plays, he'll improve a woeful run defense.

**2-52 Brian Leonard, RB, Rutgers**

A good receiver out of the backfield and a good blocker.

**3-84 Jonathan Wade, CB, Tennessee**

Raw but promising talent must improve his technique.

**5-139 Dustin Fry, C, Clemson**

Big, powerful mauler (6-3, 315) eventually will replace Andy McCollum.

**5-154 Clifton Ryan, DT, Michigan State**

Stout and tough inside but isn't likely to make the rotation in '07.

**6-190 Ken Shackleford, OT, Georgia**

Has ideal size (6-5, 325) for the right side. Knows how to anchor.

**7-248 Keith Jackson, DT, Arkansas**

Undersized tackle (6-0, 296) looks like a roster long shot.

**7-249 Derek Stanley, WR, Wisconsin-Whitewater**

Has return potential but likely will be on the practice squad.

### VETERAN PLAYERS

**Additions:** WR Drew Bennett (FA/Titans), LB Chris Draft (FA/Panthers), WR Dante Hall (trade/Chiefs), DE James Hall (trade/Lions), S Todd Johnson (FA/Bears), P Donnie Jones (FA/Dolphins), TE Randy McMichael (FA/Dolphins), RB Travis Minor (FA/Dolphins), CB Mike Rumph (FA/Redskins), CB Lenny Walls (FA/Chiefs).

**Losses:** LB Dexter Coakley (FA), WR Kevin Curtis (FA/Eagles), CB Travis Fisher (FA/Lions), DE Brandon Green (FA/Seahawks), WR Shaun McDonald (FA/Lions), FB Paul Smith (FA/Broncos), G Adam Timmerman (FA), P Matt Turk (FA).

## PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
QB ▲ Marc Bulger	LE ▲ Leonard Little	□ Eric Moore	
■ Gus Frerotte	DT ■ La'Roi Glover	□ Claude Wroten	
FB ● Madison Hedgecock	DT ● Adam Carriker	■ Jimmy Kennedy	
● Joe Klopfenstein	RE ■ James Hall	● Victor Adeyanju	
RB ▲ Steven Jackson	SLB ● Brandon Chillar	● Chris Draft	
■ Brian Leonard	MLB ■ Will Witherspoon	□ Tim McGarigle	
WR ▲ Torry Holt	WLB ■ Pisa Tinoisamoa	□ Jon Alston	
● Dante Hall	LCB ● Tye Hill	● Ron Bartell	
WR ■ Isaac Bruce	SS ■ Corey Chavous	● Todd Johnson	
■ Drew Bennett	FS ● O.J. Atogwe	● Jerome Carter	
TE ■ Randy McMichael	RCB ■ Fakhir Brown	● Jerametrius Butler	
● Joe Klopfenstein			
LT ▲ Orlando Pace			
■ Todd Steussie			
LG ● Mark Setterstrom			
□ Claude Terrell			
C ● Brett Romberg			
● Andy McCollum			
RG ■ Richie Incognito			
● Adam Goldberg			
RT ● Alex Barron			
□ Drew Strojny			

## SPECIALISTS

K ▲ Jeff Wilkins	KR ■ Dante Hall
P ■ Donnie Jones	PR ■ Dante Hall
	LS ▲ Chris Massey
▲ Elite ■ Solid ● Adequate □ Fringe	

Depth charts updated weekly at [sportingnews.com](http://sportingnews.com)

## RAMS ROSTER

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL exp.	College	How acq.	2006 GP/GS
QUARTERBACKS							
10	Marc Bulger	6-3/215	4/5/77	7	West Virginia	FA/01	16/16
11	Ryan Fitzpatrick	6-2/221	11/24/82	3	Harvard	D7a/05	1/0
12	Gus Frerotte	6-3/237	7/31/71	14	Tulsa	FA/06	1/0
RUNNING BACKS							
32	Rich Alexis	6-0/213	5/6/81	3	Washington	FA/07	1/0
48	Stephen Davis	6-0/230	3/1/74	12	Auburn	FA/06	15/0
33	Kay-Jay Harris	6-0/229	3/27/79	2	West Virginia	FA/06	7/0
44	Madison Hedgecock (FB)	6-3/266	8/27/81	3	North Carolina	D7b/05	16/9
39	Steven Jackson	6-2/233	7/22/83	4	Oregon State	D1/04	16/16
36	Brian Leonard	6-2/235	2/3/84	R	Rutgers	D2/07	—
45	Chris Massey (LS/FB)	6-0/245	8/21/79	6	Marshall	D7/02	16/0
27	Travis Minor	5-10/203	6/30/79	7	Florida State	FA/07	16/0
RECEIVERS							
49	Mark Anelli (TE)	6-3/265	6/5/79	2	Wisconsin	FA/07	0/0
83	Drew Bennett	6-5/206	8/26/78	7	UCLA	FA/07	16/15
80	Isaac Bruce	6-0/188	11/10/72	14	Memphis	D2/94	16/14
86	Dominique Byrd (TE)	6-2/260	2/7/84	2	USC	D3c/06	5/0
15	Marques Hagans	5-10/209	12/29/82	1	Virginia	D5/06	0/0
82	Dante Hall	5-8/187	9/20/78	8	Texas A&M	T-KC/07	15/0
81	Torry Holt	6-0/190	6/5/76	9	N.C. State	D1/99	16/16
82	Joe Klopfenstein (TE/FB)	6-5/255	11/9/83	2	Colorado	D2/06	16/16
89	Dane Looker	6-0/194	4/5/76	6	Washington	FA/02	16/0
84	Randy McMichael (TE)	6-3/250	6/28/79	6	Georgia	FA/07	16/16
19	Derek Stanley	5-11/175	8/27/85	R	Wisc.-Whitewater	D7b/07	—
17	Dominique Thompson	5-11/205	12/28/82	3	William & Mary	FA/05	0/0
87	Aaron Walker (TE)	6-6/270	3/14/80	5	Florida	FA/05	16/5
OFFENSIVE LINEMEN							
70	Alex Barron (T)	6-7/320	9/28/82	3	Florida State	D1/05	16/16
62	Dustin Fry (C)	6-3/315	10/3/83	R	Clemson	D5a/07	—
72	Adam Goldberg (G)	6-7/310	8/12/80	5	Wyoming	T-Min/06	14/2
68	Richie Incognito (G/C)	6-3/305	7/5/83	3	Nebraska	D3b/05	16/16
67	Andy McCollum (C)	6-4/300	6/2/70	14	Toledo	FA/99	1/1
76	Orlando Pace (T)	6-7/325	11/4/75	11	Ohio State	D1/97	8/8
64	Jeremy Parquet (T)	6-6/321	4/11/82	3	S. Mississippi	FA/06	0/0
65	Brett Romberg (C)	6-2/298	10/10/79	4	Miami	FA/06	10/3
66	Mark Setterstrom (G)	6-4/314	3/3/84	2	Minnesota	D7b/06	7/6
69	Ken Shackelford (T)	6-5/325	2/2/85	R	Georgia	D6/07	—
79	Todd Steussie (T)	6-6/310	12/1/70	14	California	FA/06	16/15
77	Drew Strojny (T)	6-7/305	6/30/81	1	Duke	FA/06	0/0
75	Claude Terrell (G)	6-2/330	4/20/82	3	New Mexico	D4b/05	0/0
DEFENSIVE LINEMEN							
94	Victor Adeyanju (E)	6-4/268	2/11/83	2	Indiana	D4/06	12/9
90	Adam Carriker (T)	6-6/292	5/6/84	R	Nebraska	D1/07	—
96	James Hall (E)	6-2/280	2/4/77	8	Michigan	T-DET/07	7/7
97	La'Roi Glover (T)	6-2/290	7/4/74	12	San Diego State	FA/06	16/16
98	Keith Jackson (T)	6-0/296	2/25/85	R	Arkansas	D7a/07	—
95	Trevor Johnson (E)	6-4/260	2/26/81	4	Nebraska	FA/07	1/0
73	Jimmy Kennedy (T)	6-4/320	11/15/79	5	Penn State	D1/03	16/16
91	Leonard Little (E)	6-3/261	10/19/74	10	Tennessee	D3/98	16/16
92	Eric Moore (E)	6-4/268	2/28/81	3	Florida State	FA/06	7/0
93	Clifton Ryan (T)	6-2/302	2/18/84	R	Michigan State	D5b/07	—
71	Tim Sandridge (T)	6-1/300	6/12/83	1	Virginia Tech	FA/06	0/0
99	Claude Wroten (T)	6-2/292	9/16/83	2	LSU	D3a/06	15/0
LINEBACKERS							
57	Jon Alston	6-0/218	6/4/83	2	Stanford	D3b/06	3/0
55	Jamal Brooks	6-2/238	11/9/76	6	Hampton	FA/06	7/0
54	Brandon Chillar	6-3/243	10/21/82	4	UCLA	D4/04	16/14
52	Chris Draft	5-11/232	2/26/76	10	Stanford	FA/05	16/16
59	Tim McGarigle	6-0/240	10/25/83	2	Northwestern	D7a/06	0/0
56	Raonall Smith	6-2/241	10/22/78	5	Washington State	FA/06	16/0
50	Pisa Tinoisamoa	6-1/235	7/15/81	5	Hawaii	D2/03	11/11
51	Will Witherspoon	6-1/231	8/19/80	6	Georgia	FA/06	16/16
DEFENSIVE BACKS							
21	O.J. Atogwe (S)	5-11/210	6/23/81	3	Stanford	D3a/05	16/16
24	Ron Bartell (CB)	6-1/200	2/22/82	3	Howard	D2/05	16/1
23	Fakhir Brown (CB)	5-11/192	9/21/77	8	Grambling State	FA/06	14/14
24	Jerametrius Butler (CB)	5-10/181	11/28/78	7	Kansas State	D5/01	7/0
42	Jerome Carter (S)	5-11/217	10/25/82	3	Florida State	D4a/05	14/0
25	Corey Chavous (S)	6-1/205	1/15/76	10	Vanderbilt	FA/06	16/16
26	Tye Hill (CB)	5-10/185	6/3/82	2	Clemson	D1/06	16/10
35	Todd Johnson (S)	6-1/200	12/18/78	5	Florida	FA/07	12/6
20	Josh Lay (CB)	6-1/197	9/8/82	1	Pittsburgh	FA/07	0/0
31	Mike Rumph (CB)	6-2/205	11/8/79	6	Miami (Fla.)	FA/07	7/0
37	Jonathan Wade (CB)	6-0/195	3/27/84	R	Tennessee	D3/07	—
27	Lenny Walls (CB)	6-4/192	9/26/79	6	Boston College	FA/07	16/2
SPECIALISTS							
5	Donnie Jones (P)	6-2/222	7/5/80	4	LSU	FA/07	16/0
14	Jeff Wilkins (K)	6-2/205	4/19/72	14	Youngstown State	FA/97	16/0

Abbreviations: D1-draft pick, first round; W-claimed on waivers; T-obtained in trade; FA-free-agent acquisition.

# 49ERS

**With a developing offense and an overhauled defense, the team could make a run at the playoffs**

**SN PICK** 1st, NFC West (10-6)

**BY DENNIS GEORGATOS**

Two years ago, Mike Nolan inherited a 49ers team with the worst pool of talent in the league and the record to prove it.

There have been plenty of changes since then, and the expectations are rising in Nolan's third season as coach. "It will be a disappointment to me if we don't make the playoffs," he says.

Pulling off the turnaround will be complicated by the offseason loss of all three coordinators, though. Nolan fired defensive coordinator Billy Davis, and offensive play-caller Norv Turner and special teams coach Larry MacDuff left for other jobs.

But reasons for optimism remain. Frank Gore is developing into one of the league's elite running backs, Alex Smith is growing as a quarterback, and the play of the offensive line is promising. Heading into the off-season, the team had a desperate need at wide receiver, but division rival Seattle helped fill it by sending its top receiver, Darrell Jackson, to the 49ers in a draft-weekend trade.

The team threw money and draft picks at the biggest problem—the defense. It spent about \$40 million to sign four new starters, including cornerback Nate Clements, arguably the top prize of the 2007 free-agent crop. And six of the team's nine draft picks were used on defenders.

The 49ers endured their fourth consecutive losing season when they finished 7-9 in 2006, but they nevertheless put themselves in the playoff hunt late in the year. This year, they could ride continued improvement into the postseason.

## OFFENSE

The 49ers couldn't keep Turner, but they will keep his system, which uses a power running game to set up the pass. Jim Hostler, promoted from quarterbacks coach to replace Turner, is a first-time NFL coordinator but is familiar with Turner's system and will be in his third year with Smith, so there will be some semblance of continuity. Gore's emergence has stamped the 49ers as a power running team, but Smith's continued development could allow Hostler

## SCHEDULE

*All times Eastern*

Sept. 10	ARIZONA*	10:15
Sept. 16	at St. Louis	1:00
Sept. 23	at Pittsburgh	1:00
Sept. 30	SEATTLE	4:05
Oct. 7	BALTIMORE	4:15
Oct. 14	Open date	
Oct. 21	at N.Y. Giants	1:00
Oct. 28	NEW ORLEANS	4:15
Nov. 4	at Atlanta	1:00
Nov. 12	at Seattle*	8:30
Nov. 18	ST. LOUIS	4:15
Nov. 25	at Arizona	4:05
Dec. 2	at Carolina	1:00
Dec. 9	MINNESOTA	4:05
Dec. 15	CINCINNATI††	8:15
Dec. 23	TAMPA BAY	8:15
Dec. 30	at Cleveland	1:00

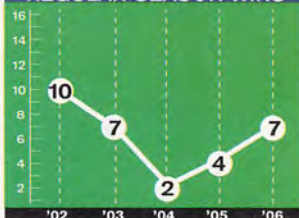
Strength of schedule: 30th

\*Monday

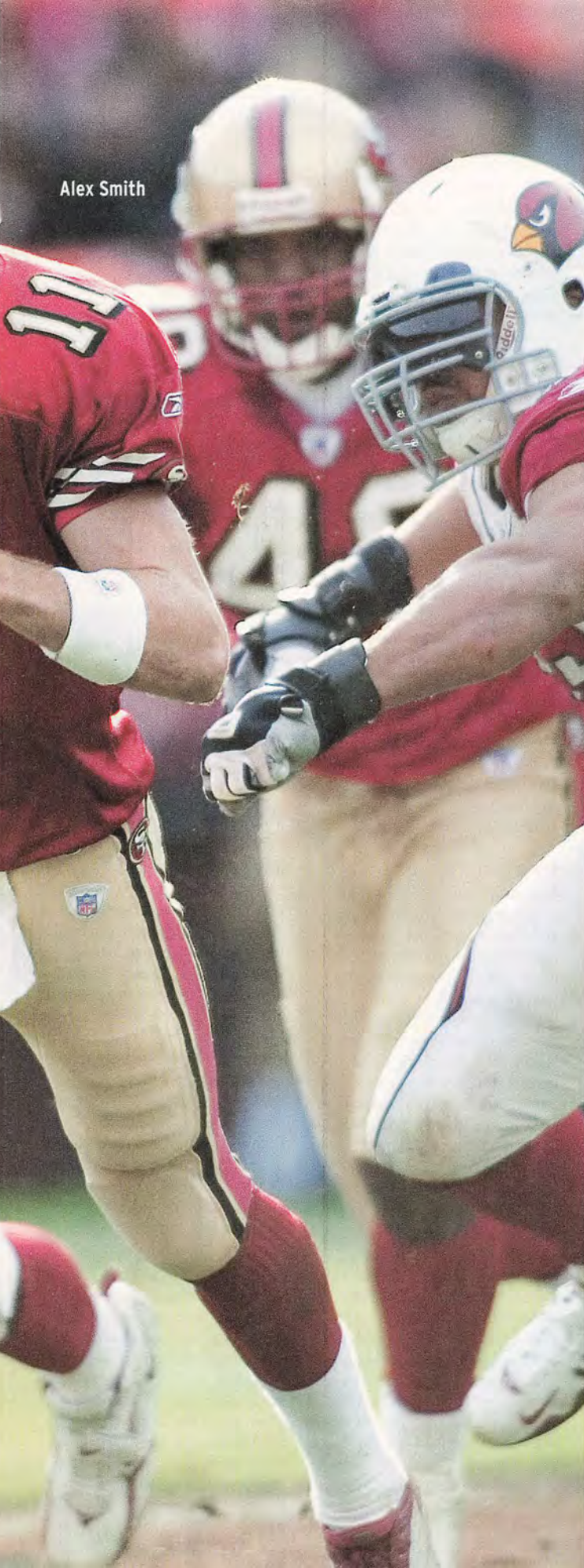
††Saturday

Analysis of every 49ers game:  
[sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom](http://sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom)

## REGULAR-SEASON WINS



Alex Smith



to expand elements of the passing game and work toward greater balance on offense.

**Quarterbacks**—Smith nearly doubled his passer rating last season, and the continuity in the system and with Hostler will give Smith a chance to improve further this season. He showed in 2006 that he has the composure to manage a game and the athleticism to throw on the run. He needs to continue to develop his accuracy and touch on medium and deep throws, though.

Backup Trent Dilfer didn't get any snaps last season but, at 35, still has the skills to come in and help the 49ers win a game if they need him to. He lacks Smith's mobility, but Dilfer still has decent arm strength and commands respect in the huddle. No. 3 Shaun Hill has a strong arm but lacks consistency with his touch and accuracy. **GRADE: B-**

**Running backs**—Gore had a franchise-record 1,695 yards rushing last season, which trailed only LaDainian Tomlinson's and Larry Johnson's totals on the NFL leaderboard.

Compact and powerful, Gore alternately slips tackles and runs over people. His runs give life to the play-action passing game, and his sure hands as a receiver make him a constant threat. Wearing him down is a concern, though: He had a franchise-record 312 carries last season while also leading the team with 61 catches.

Nolan hopes backups Maurice Hicks and Michael Robinson will help ease the load on Gore. Hicks provides a change of pace with his speed; he can be tough to catch if he manages to turn the corner or finds an open lane on a run between the tackles. Robinson still is learning the position after playing quarterback in college, but he has good size and plays with the kind of strength and toughness that could enable him to develop into an effective runner.

Fullback Moran Norris is a rugged lead blocker for Gore and

## SCOUT TAKES

### A scout from another team sizes up the 49ers

Unless they come up with a No. 2 back who can take away some of the carries, I see a short window for **Frank Gore**. He's had durability issues in his career and with the way he runs, he'll take too much of a pounding. ... **Vernon Davis** is scary to me. You find ways to get him the ball and let the athleticism, size and speed take over. He would have had an unbelievable rookie year if not for the leg injury. ... I don't think **Alex Smith** is a difference-maker. He's a smart quarterback and if he plays within himself, he has a chance to let the offense work for him. But if you put the ball in his hands and tell him to win it week in and week out, that's not going to happen. ... **Nate Clements** is a good corner with good size. But if they think he's a **Champ Bailey**-type shutdown corner, they'll be sadly mistaken and disappointed.



ROBERT SEALE / SN ARCHIVES

JAY DROWNS / SN

a third-down receiving option. **GRADE: A-**

**Receivers**—The 49ers haven't had a 1,000-yard receiver since 2003, Terrell Owens' final season with the team. But despite cutting talented but disruptive starting receiver Antonio Bryant in the offseason, the team has significantly improved at the position. That's in large part because of the addition of Jackson, who is expected to be the team's No. 1 receiver. He has good speed and instincts to gain separation from defenders but will need to build a rapport with Smith.

The 49ers also added free agent Ashley Lelie and envision him as a vertical threat, but he has struggled with concentration lapses and drops. Arnaz Battle, the team's top returning wideout, has become a more polished route runner, which has helped him gain separation more consistently. Because he also can make tough catches over the middle, he gives Smith a reliable option on third down.

Jason Hill, a third-round pick, bolsters the depth in the receiving corps. He had the second-fastest 40 time—4.32—by a wideout at the Combine and could push Lelie for playing time. Hill has a knack for getting open deep and completing the big play. Bryan Gilmore and Brandon Williams also are candidates for the No. 3 job, but Gilmore has contributed more on reverses than with receptions and Williams didn't have a catch last season.

The big-play element in the receiving unit could be tight end Vernon Davis. His unique blend of speed and strength makes him a threat to score from anywhere on the field. Backup Billy Bajema brings strength and toughness to two-tight end sets. Delanie Walker can help as an H-back and has the speed and receiving ability to develop into a reliable option. **GRADE: C**

**Line**—Much of Gore's yardage last season came on runs to the left side, where tackle Jonas Jennings and guard Larry Allen helped clear the way. They anchor an underrated line. Allen can smother pass rushers and overpower interior defenders on drive blocks. Jennings has had some injury problems, but when he's healthy, he provides solid backside protection for Smith.

Center Eric Heitmann suffered a broken leg last December, but team doctors expect him to be at full strength by training

## SCOUTING REPORTS: OFFENSE

### ↑ Alex Smith, QB

**Strengths:** Shows great character and terrific physical skills. Has outstanding football intelligence. Has good arm strength and can hit the open receiver. Shows good timing on throws.

**Weaknesses:** Knows what to do with the ball, but under a rush, struggles to adjust and make the easy throw. Can be rattled and needs everything around him to be perfect to be effective.

**Bottom line:** Smith has made tremendous strides in the past two seasons. He's smart and has a strong arm and lots of positive intangibles. **Grade: 6.8**

### ↑ Frank Gore, RB

**Strengths:** Strong inside runner who runs with good pad level. Keeps legs churning on contact. Has above-average speed but is better in short areas. A willing blocker. Has an outstanding work ethic and leadership ability.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to learn to be more patient. Will run up the backs of his linemen. Has average hands.

**Bottom line:** Gore had a career year in 2006, and if he can match it in 2007, he'll have established himself as one of the NFL's top backs. **Grade: 7.9**

### Moran Norris, FB

**Strengths:** A tough, hard-nosed player and reliable receiver. Gets good pop at the point of attack and has enough lower-body strength to drive most linebackers out of the hole. Capable short-yardage runner.

**Weaknesses:** Rarely explodes into defenders. Not elusive as a runner and lacks burst as a receiver. Needs to increase his explosion as a blocker.

**Bottom line:** Norris is a mountain-sized fullback. He is at his best when he can simply lead the running back through the hole on isolation runs. **Grade: 6.5**

### ↓ Darrell Jackson, WR

**Strengths:** Has terrific initial burst and elusiveness. Extremely difficult to press. Breaks quickly and is a terrific route runner. Sets up defenders and sniffs out soft spots in zone coverage. Shifty and shows good awareness after the catch. Gets upfield quickly.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks elite size and speed. Not a matchup weapon on fade routes, jump balls or in the red zone. Sometimes loses focus and drops balls. Has durability issues.

**Bottom line:** Jackson is a top-notch receiver but has not been able to stay on the field because of injuries. **Grade: 7.5**

### ↓ Ashley Lelie, WR

**Strengths:** Excellent athlete with good size and big-play potential. Has good speed and solid hands and can adjust to throws outside his frame.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks consistency. Sometimes takes his eyes off the ball.

Not tough. Lacks the body control to quickly get in and out of his breaks. Lacks strength. Must work on his route running. **Bottom line:** Lelie has not lived up to his first-round selection in '02. He has big-play ability but lacks reliability. **Grade: 6.3**

### ↑ Vernon Davis, TE

**Strengths:** Has soft hands and catches the ball well. Has a big vertical leap and makes acrobatic catches. Has a great understanding of the passing game. Has elite speed for the position. Can stretch defenses but also can turn short routes into long gains. A very good route runner. Quick off the line. Shows the burst to create separation in the open field and to keep away from defenders.

**Weaknesses:** Sometimes struggles if defenders lock on. Not a strong blocker. Broken leg caused him to miss much of his rookie season.

**Bottom line:** A super athlete, Davis has prototypical size and strength and outstanding speed for his position. Davis will have a tremendous impact on the offense if he's completely healthy. **Grade: 8.6**

### ↓ Jonas Jennings, T

**Strengths:** Has great size and can anchor solidly. Bull rushers won't knock him back. Has a feisty attitude and won't lose if locked on. Comes off the ball with good punch in the running game. Aggressive; keeps driving his legs and is good at finishing blocks.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks quickness and struggles to get set in pass protection.



## FANTASY SOURCE PICKS

**STUD**  
RB Frank Gore

**SLEEPER**  
QB Alex Smith

**STUMBLER**  
WR Darrell Jackson

**ON THE RISE**  
TE Vernon Davis



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Players are graded by War Room scouts on a 1-10 scale.  
\*Rookies (not graded)

Can redirect but has difficulty with good speed rushers outside and can be foiled by good double moves. Injury-prone.

**Bottom line:** Jennings is a strong player who is very good as a run blocker. He and Larry Allen give the 49ers a formidable left side. **Grade: 7.0**

#### ↓ Kwame Harris, T

**Strengths:** Has great size and ability. Has long arms and can force oppo-

blocker who has been a leader for a young 49ers team. **Grade: 8.0.**

#### ↑ Justin Smiley, G

**Strengths:** Aggressive coming off the ball and has good pop and an excellent first step. Has good quickness, works hard and does a nice job pulling. Has good athletic ability, can get to the second level and uses his hands well.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks the strength to



nents to take the long way to the quarterback. Very aggressive in the running game and can move the pile and get to linebackers.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to improve his technique in pass protection. Takes false steps, struggles to get his pad level down, overextends and gets off balance. Doesn't have natural strength. **Bottom line:** Harris is a decent starter, but he never has lived up to his billing coming out of college. **Grade: 6.5**

#### ↓ Larry Allen, G

**Strengths:** Gets good hand placement and delivers a strong initial punch. Explodes into blocks. Can push the pile in short-yardage situations and wear down defenders. Takes good angles to blocks and rarely takes false steps.

**Weaknesses:** Has lost quickness. Has problems stopping top one-gap defenders. Losing range and his ability to pull and trap. Doesn't always play under control. Durability is a concern. **Bottom line:** Allen's career is winding down, but he is a dominating run

move the pile, plays with a narrow base and has difficulty maintaining blocks. Sometimes is beaten by good inside moves and must work on his balance.

**Bottom line:** Smiley has improved his technique and strength and now is a valuable starter. **Grade: 7.8**

#### Eric Heitmann, C

**Strengths:** Has a good first step and quickness and gets into good position. Intelligent and solid in pass protection; takes good angles to blocks and uses his hands well.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks running ability and the strength to get movement in the running game. Overextends in pass protection. Can get to the second level but struggles to sustain blocks. Plays with a narrow base and is off his feet too much.

**Bottom line:** Heitmann is a tough, decent starter. His natural position is guard, but he has the smarts and physical makeup to play in the middle. **Grade: 6.9**

**KEY:** ↑ Ascending ↓ Descending

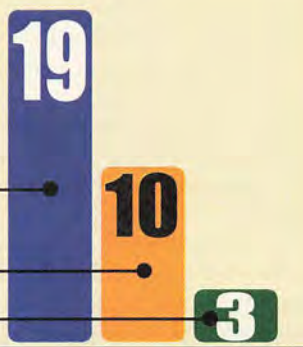
## INSIDERS POLL

With Norv Turner gone, Alex Smith's development as a QB will:

Still trend up

Probably stall early in the season

Be in deep doo-doo



## BOLD PREDICTIONS

**1** Vernon Davis will emerge as QB Alex Smith's go-to receiver and become the first tight end in team history to surpass 1,000 receiving yards.

**2** OLB Tully Banta-Cain will be the first 49er to register double digits in sacks since Andre Carter had 12½ in 2002.

**3** With Nate Clements holding down one corner spot, opposing offenses will pick on CB Walt Harris. At 33, Harris can't be expected to match his production from last year, when he tied for the NFC lead with eight picks.

camp. Right guard Justin Smiley is perhaps the team's most athletic lineman. His strength and mobility make him a forceful blocker when he's leading a sweep or pulling on a trap or counter play.

Right tackle Kwame Harris has made strides as a run blocker but remains susceptible to quick, athletic pass rushers. He needs to engage pass rushers more aggressively and maintain a lower center of gravity. He can expect to be challenged by Adam Snyder and Joe Staley, the second of the team's two first-round picks. A strong, tough lineman who plays with a bit of a mean streak, Snyder pushed Harris for a starting spot in training camp last year before being sidelined for several weeks with a knee injury. Snyder is versatile; he filled in for injured starters at left guard and left tackle last season. Staley is a converted tight end with the athleticism and strength to stay with speed rushers. He can play tackle on either side.

Tony Wragge provides depth at guard and center. Davis Baas didn't play much in his first two seasons, but he began showing signs of improvement late last season and could challenge Smiley for playing time. **GRADE: B**

### DEFENSE

After finishing last in the NFL in yards allowed per game in 2005 and giving up the most points in the league last season, a major defensive overhaul is underway. Nolan is committed to the 3-4 this season, and Greg Manusky was hired as the new coordinator. In the offseason, the team focused on signing free agents who fit the scheme. In the 3-4, look for the 49ers to have more of an attacking style.

**Line**—With the transition to the 3-4, the 49ers are reshuffling

their front. The addition of free-agent nose tackle Aubrayo Franklin was part of a move to get bigger and stouter. Franklin was a backup in Baltimore but has shown the strength to dig in and the bulk to clog the middle.

Franklin and ends Bryant Young and Marques Douglas will be counted on to occupy blockers and hold their ground, which will allow the linebackers to sweep in and tackle ballcarriers. The team also will rely on the front three to create pressure on passing downs and help open rush lanes for blitzing linebackers.

Young's playing time will be watched closely. He's 35, and coaches want to reduce his snaps to maintain his effectiveness. Douglas is 30 and also will have his playing time monitored. Both are tough, physical players capable of doing the dirty work against the run, then can slide inside on passing downs to push the pocket.

Isaac Sopoaga, Melvin Oliver and Ronald Fields all figure to play prominent roles in the line rotation. Sopoaga, who will back up Franklin, has great strength but lacks technique and can be susceptible to power blocks when he plays high. Fields and Oliver will spell Young and Douglas at end, as will third-round pick Ray McDonald. All three are physical players with the size and athleticism to contain in run support, but they lack experience and need to work on maintaining disciplined technique. **GRADE: B-**

**Linebackers**—With linemen filling gaps and taking on blockers, the linebackers must be playmakers in the 3-4. To help them do that, the 49ers made Patrick Willis their top draft pick and signed Tully Banta-Cain to pair with Manny Lawson on the outside. Willis is slated to be the nickel linebacker, where his speed and instincts will factor into pass coverage or blitz packages, but he'll also compete with Derek Smith for the starting job in the middle. Banta-Cain could give the 49ers the pass-rush spark off the edge they've lacked. He had a career-best 5½ sacks last season for New England and showed quickness and tenacity pressuring the pocket, but he needs to become more consistent in run support. Lawson is athletic and has the quickness and instincts to chase down ballcarriers in run support or to cover tight ends or running backs. He rushes the passer effectively but lacks the bulk to consistently break through the league's top pass blockers.

## SECRET WEAPON

### ARNAZ BATTLE, WR

He has flown under the radar while establishing himself as one of the 49ers' most consistent and reliable receivers. A quarterback in college, Battle led the team's wideouts with 59 catches in 2006 and is continuing to add polish to his game. He is physical, can screen defenders from the ball and fights for extra yards.

MICHAEL McNAMARA / SN ARCHIVES

## SCOUTING REPORTS: DEFENSE

### Bryant Young, E

**Strengths:** Has good size, excellent strength and outstanding awareness. Good at diagnosing plays, is explosive and can dominate. Outstanding one-gap player who doesn't get driven off the ball and can control the line. Plays with great intensity, can collapse the pocket and runs hard in pursuit. Has effective pass-rush moves and uses his hands well.

**Weaknesses:** Gets too aggressive, overextends and gets pulled to the ground. Stops moving his feet when stalemated.

**Bottom line:** Young isn't showing his age much. He is an intense competitor who is a difference-maker when healthy. **Grade: 8.0**

### Marques Douglas, E

**Strengths:** Thrives on his ability to wear down foes through effort and quickness. Extremely quick off the ball, often wins with his first move and is active in the short area. Plays well on the move; stacks and sheds nicely. Plays with good leverage. Best at stunting and penetrating gaps.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks the speed to be a sideline-to-sideline player and the bulk to hold up consistently. Can be overpowered when opponents run at him.

**Bottom line:** Douglas makes plays on effort and smarts. There is nothing flashy to his game. **Grade: 6.6**

### Aubrayo Franklin, T

**Strengths:** A big two-gap tackle with excellent size and solid strength.

**Weaknesses:** Very raw in terms of his ability to shed blocks. Needs to improve his techniques and use of his hands.

**Bottom line:** Franklin has the bulk, stamina and strength to hold up as a two-gap run stuffer and protect the linebackers behind him. **Grade: 6.2**

### Derek Smith, LB

**Strengths:** Has excellent quickness and instincts and good lateral movement. Has adequate speed and can make plays from sideline to sideline. Aggressive going to the ball and plays with little wasted motion. Can uncoil when taking on blockers, uses his hands well and gets good depth in his drops in zone coverage.

**Weaknesses:** Stiff and mediocre in man coverage. Struggles to turn and

run. Not a great athlete.

**Bottom line:** Smith is a durable inside player, and his toughness, work ethic and leadership make him a valuable starter. **Grade: 7.5**

### Manny Lawson, LB

**Strengths:** An outstanding natural athlete with rare speed. Plays bigger than his size. An explosive tackler. As a pass rusher, flies off the edge and shows a great closing burst. Shows the speed to blow past top tackles. Shows good instincts, takes good angles and makes sound open-field tackles.

**Weaknesses:** Undersized. Must strengthen his lower body and play with better leverage at the point of attack. Can get overwhelmed against the run. Must learn to use his hands better to shed blocks.

**Bottom line:** Lawson is an instinctive player who immediately grasped the NFL game and was a productive starter as a rookie in 2006. **Grade: 7.3**

### Brandon Moore, LB

**Strengths:** An impressive physical specimen. Has great strength and is a fluid athlete. Has good quickness and adequate running ability and moves with confidence in space. A strong tackler with good agility.

**Weaknesses:** Raw and lacks instincts against the run. Lacks awareness, does not play with leverage and struggles in traffic.

**Bottom line:** Moore is a good, developing player who is stout enough to play between the tackles but also can move outside and rush the quarterback. **Grade: 7.0**

### Tully Banta-Cain, LB

**Strengths:** Has an explosive first step and changes directions quickly. Slips blocks and makes plays on the move and in space. Excels at breaking down and wrapping up in the open field. Takes good angles as a pass rusher and uses his hands well.

**Weaknesses:** Relatively inexperienced in pass coverage. Needs a wider variety of pass-rush moves.

**Bottom line:** Banta-Cain has a high ceiling as a situational pass rusher off the edge in the team's 3-4 scheme. **Grade: 6.9**

### Nate Clements, CB

**Strengths:** Excels in man coverage. Physical, aggressive and confident.



CJ GUNTHER FOR SN

Clements

Smothers receivers at the line. Can turn and run without losing much in transition. Has explosive speed and can make up for his mistakes. Has very good change-of-direction skills and exceptional hands and leaping ability. Superb return specialist.

**Weaknesses:** Must improve his concentration and recognition skills. Relies on his physical tools and speed too much. Takes too many chances.

**Bottom line:** Clements is one of the best cornerbacks in the NFL and provides an immediate upgrade to the secondary. **Grade: 9.0**

### Walt Harris, CB

**Strengths:** Has good man-to-man coverage skills. Can mirror receivers' routes with solid quickness and speed. Has sound footwork and can burst out of his cuts. Does not give up big plays or make mistakes.

**Weaknesses:** Does not make big plays. Average in run support. Does not use his hands to shed blocks and doesn't tackle well.

**Bottom line:** Harris is a solid veteran who still can play cornerback at a high level because of his size and smarts. **Grade: 7.7**

### Michael Lewis, S

**Strengths:** A monster hitter and intimidating presence. An outstanding tackler who has great instincts against the run. Steps up and fills quickly and will take on blockers. Has good range and regularly gets to the outside. A great blitzer and an elite playmaker.

**Weaknesses:** Better coming forward and attacking than in coverage. Needs to improve his man-to-man coverage skills.

**Bottom line:** Lewis, 27, has great instincts and playmaking ability for a player his age. He continues to get better with experience. **Grade: 8.2**

### Mark Roman, S

**Strengths:** Quick and fluid. Turns his hips and stays low in his backpedal. Aggressive when the ball is in the air and has good ball skills. Has excellent speed and can match up with most slot receivers in man coverage.

**Weaknesses:** Not physical or well-suited for playing in the box. Tends to guess in coverage. Must improve his technique and recognition skills. Has had durability problems.

**Bottom line:** Roman is a gifted cover safety, but he needs to work on his tackling. **Grade: 6.4**

## KEY MOVES

### 2007 DRAFT PICKS

Rd.-Pick

GRADE A-

#### 1-11 Patrick Willis, ILB, Mississippi

Will compete for a starting inside linebacker job. Hits with force.

#### 1-28 Joe Staley, OT, Central Michigan

Capable of playing left or right tackle. Has a long wingspan.

#### 3-76 Jason Hill, WR, Washington State

A strong, sure-handed receiver with a knack for making big plays.

#### 3-97 Ray McDonald, DE, Florida

Has good quickness off the ball. Plays with solid leverage.

#### 4-104 Jay Moore, OLB, Nebraska

A defensive end in college; projects as an outside linebacker in a 3-4 scheme.

#### 4-126 Dashon Goldson, S, Washington

Has good size (6-2, 202) but lacks elite speed.

#### 4-135 Joe Cohen, DL, Florida

Could play end or nose tackle. Tough, hard-nosed player.

#### 5-147 Tarell Brown, CB, Texas

Plays physical in coverage and run support. Has had off-field problems.

#### 6-186 Thomas Clayton, RB, Kansas State

Has had character issues. Strong and fast with big-play ability.

### VETERAN PLAYERS

**Additions:** LB Tully Banta-Cain (FA/Patriots), LB Colby Brockwoldt (FA/Titans), CB Nate Clements (FA/Bills), NT Aubrayo Franklin (FA/Ravens), WR Darrell Jackson (trade/Seahawks), WR Ashley Lelie (FA/Falcons), S Michael Lewis (FA/Eagles).

**Losses:** DT Anthony Adams (FA/Bears), S Mike Adams (FA/Browns), WR Antonio Bryant (FA), S Deke Cooper (FA/Panthers), CB Sammy Davis (FA/Buccaneers), TE Eric Johnson (FA/Saints), C Jeremy Newberry (FA/Raiders).

On the inside, Brandon Moore is an aggressive, forceful tackler, and he led the team with 6½ sacks last season. Smith underwent surgery in the offseason to repair a damaged eye muscle, which is expected to improve his tackling and reactions. Jeff Ulbrich will be a solid backup at both of the inside positions; he plays capably against the run. Roderick Green, Hannibal Navies and Parys Haralson will provide depth on the outside. Green and Haralson are both strong, aggressive pass rushers.

#### GRADE: B-

**Secondary**—The first two free agents the 49ers signed were Clements and safety Michael Lewis. Both will move into starting roles, which will strengthen a secondary that was vulnerable last season and couldn't hold up long enough to allow for an effective pass rush.

Clements gives the team a shutdown corner. He's an aggressive ballhawk who will be matched up against the opposing team's top receiver every week.

Walt Harris, coming off his first Pro Bowl season, will line up opposite Clements. Harris is a good cover man with a knack for making plays—his eight interceptions tied for the NFC lead last season.

Mark Roman and Lewis bring a physical presence to the middle of the field. Lewis has been susceptible in coverage, but he's expected to play close to the line to take advantage of his tackling ability. Roman is undersized but has good coverage skills and reacts well to the ball in the air.

Cornerback Shawntae Spencer, a starter the past three years,

will give the 49ers an additional cover man on passing downs. Keith Lewis, who made nine starts at free safety, can play both positions and gives the team a solid backup. **GRADE: B**

## SPECIAL TEAMS

Al Everest is the new special teams coordinator, and he inherits a strong group of players to work with. Kicker Joe Nedney gives the 49ers an added weapon with his ability to convert

onside kicks; the team recovered three last season. Punter Andy Lee consistently helped the team in the field-position battle.

Williams handled punt return duties last season but did little to improve field position—only three players in the NFL averaged less than his 6.7 yards per punt return.

Hicks, the primary kick returner, was solid; he averaged 25.1 yards per return. Keith Lewis is a fierce hitter on special teams and gives the coverage units an edge in limiting the yards opposing returners get.

**GRADE: B+**

## BOTTOM LINE

Under Nolan, the 49ers have increased their wins from the previous year in successive seasons—and it's likely that trend will continue. In fact, with their offensive firepower and overhauled defense, the 49ers will contend for the NFC West title and perhaps return to the playoffs for the first time since 2002.

SN

*Dennis Georgatos covers the 49ers for the San Jose Mercury News.*

## PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
QB	■ Alex Smith ● Trent Dilfer	LE	■ Bryant Young ● Ronald Fields
FB	■ Moran Norris □ Zak Keasey	NT	■ Aubrayo Franklin ● Isaac Sopoaga
RB	▲ Frank Gore ● Maurice Hicks	RE	● Marques Douglas ● Melvin Oliver
WR	■ Ashley Lelie ● Jason Hill	OLB	■ Manny Lawson ● Hannibal Navies
WR	■ Darrell Jackson ● Arnaz Battle	ILB	■ Derek Smith ● Patrick Willis
TE	■ Vernon Davis ● Billy Bajema	ILB	■ Brandon Moore ● Jeff Ulbrich
LT	■ Jonas Jennings ■ Adam Snyder	OLB	● Tully Banta-Cain ● Roderick Green
LG	▲ Larry Allen ● Tony Wragge	LCB	▲ Nate Clements ● Shawntae Spencer
C	■ Eric Heitmann ● Tony Wragge	SS	■ Michael Lewis ● Keith Lewis
RG	■ Justin Smiley ● David Baas	FS	■ Mark Roman ● Keith Lewis
RT	● Kwame Harris ● Joe Staley	RCB	■ Walt Harris ● Marcus Hudson

### SPECIALISTS

K	▲ Joe Nedney	KR	■ Maurice Hicks
P	■ Andy Lee	PR	□ Brandon Williams
		LS	▲ Brian Jennings

▲ Elite ■ Solid ● Adequate □ Fringe

Depth charts updated weekly at [sportingnews.com](http://sportingnews.com)

Walt Harris

JOHN CORDES FOR SN

## 49ERS ROSTER

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL exp.	College	How acq.	2006 GP/GS
QUARTERBACKS							
12	Trent Dilfer	6-4/225	3/13/72	14	Fresno State	T-Cle/06	0/0
13	Shaun Hill	6-3/235	1/9/80	6	Maryland	FA/06	0/0
11	Alex Smith	6-4/217	5/7/84	3	Utah	D1/05	16/16
RUNNING BACKS							
35	Thomas Clayton	6-2/205	4/26/84	R	Kansas State	D6/07	—
21	Frank Gore	5-9/212	5/14/83	3	Miami (Fla.)	D3a/05	16/16
43	Maurice Hicks	5-11/200	7/22/78	4	North Carolina A&T	FA/04	16/0
85	Zak Keasey (FB)	6-0/236	3/19/82	2	Princeton	FA/05	0/0
40	Moran Norris (FB)	6-1/254	6/16/78	7	Kansas	FA/06	14/7
24	Michael Robinson	6-1/218	2/6/83	2	Penn State	D4/06	16/0
RECEIVERS							
47	Billy Bajema (TE)	6-5/259	10/31/82	3	Oklahoma State	D7d/05	16/6
83	Arnaz Battle	6-1/217	2/22/80	5	Notre Dame	D6/03	16/15
14	C.J. Brewer	6-2/205	5/12/82	2	Wyoming	FA/06	0/0
85	Vernon Davis (TE)	6-3/253	1/31/84	2	Maryland	D1a/06	10/8
84	Bryan Gilmore	6-0/195	1/21/78	8	Midwestern State	FA/06	16/3
89	Jason Hill	6-0/204	2/20/85	R	Washington State	D3a/07	—
82	Darrell Jackson	5-11/201	12/6/78	8	Florida	T-Sea/07	13/13
88	Taylor Jacobs	6-0/198	5/30/81	6	Florida	T-Was/06	8/0
86	Brian Jennings (TE/LS)	6-5/245	10/14/76	8	Arizona State	D7b/00	16/0
42	Ashley Lelie	6-3/200	2/16/80	6	Hawaii	FA/07	15/10
86	Delanie Walker (TE)	6-1/241	8/12/84	2	Central Missouri St.	D6a/06	7/1
17	Brandon Williams	5-10/179	2/24/84	2	Wisconsin	D3/06	13/0
OFFENSIVE LINEMEN							
71	Larry Allen (G)	6-3/325	11/27/71	14	Sonoma State	FA/06	11/11
64	David Baas (G/C)	6-4/319	9/28/81	3	Michigan	D2/05	16/0
76	Harvey Dahl (T)	6-5/305	6/24/81	2	Nevada-Reno	FA/05	4/0
78	Patrick Estes (T)	6-7/280	2/4/83	3	Virginia	D7c/05	0/0
77	Kwame Harris (T)	6-7/310	3/15/82	5	Stanford	D1/03	16/16
66	Eric Heitmann (G/C)	6-3/305	2/24/80	6	Stanford	D7a/02	14/14
75	Jonas Jennings (T)	6-3/325	11/21/77	7	Georgia	FA/05	13/13
65	Justin Smiley (G)	6-3/301	1/11/81	4	Alabama	D2a/04	16/16
68	Adam Snyder (G)	6-6/325	1/30/82	3	Oregon	D3b/05	14/6
74	Joe Staley (T)	6-5/306	8/30/84	R	Central Michigan	D1b/07	—
74	Nick Steitz (G)	6-4/320	8/18/82	3	Oregon	FA/06	0/0
69	Tony Wragge (G/C)	6-4/320	8/14/79	3	New Mexico State	FA/05	14/4
DEFENSIVE LINEMEN							
76	Joe Cohen (E/T)	6-2/295	6/6/84	R	Florida	D4c/07	—
94	Marques Douglas (E)	6-2/280	3/5/77	7	Howard	FA/05	16/16
95	Damane Duckett (T)	6-6/300	1/21/81	2	East Carolina	FA/06	6/0
93	Ronald Fields (E)	6-2/323	9/13/81	3	Mississippi State	D5a/05	13/9
92	Aubrayo Franklin (T)	6-1/320	8/27/80	5	Tennessee	FA/07	14/0
91	Ray McDonald (E)	6-3/276	9/2/84	R	Florida	D3b/07	—
96	Melvin Oliver (E)	6-3/279	7/25/83	2	Louisiana State	D6c/06	16/14
90	Isaac Sopoaga (T)	6-2/321	9/4/81	4	Hawaii	D4a/04	15/2
97	Bryant Young (E)	6-3/291	1/27/72	14	Notre Dame	D1/94	16/16
LINEBACKERS							
95	Tully Banta-Cain	6-2/250	8/28/80	5	California	FA/07	16/5
57	Colby Bowkwoit	6-2/237	4/14/81	4	BYU	FA/07	16/1
54	Roderick Green	6-2/270	4/26/82	4	Central Missouri St.	W-Bal/06	9/0
98	Parys Haralson	6-1/253	1/24/84	2	Tennessee	D5/06	7/0
99	Manny Lawson	6-5/240	7/3/84	2	N.C. State	D1b/06	16/12
56	Brandon Moore	6-1/242	1/16/79	6	Oklahoma	FA/02	16/11
58	Jay Moore	6-4/274	8/16/83	R	Nebraska	D4a/07	—
55	Hannibal Navies	6-3/252	7/19/77	9	Colorado	FA/06	6/2
50	Derek Smith	6-2/245	1/18/75	11	Arizona State	FA/01	13/12
53	Jeff Ulbrich	6-0/246	2/17/77	8	Hawaii	D3b/00	16/9
52	Patrick Willis	6-1/242	1/25/85	R	Mississippi	D1a/07	—
DEFENSIVE BACKS							
25	Tarell Brown (CB)	5-10/190	1/6/85	R	Texas	D5/07	—
22	Nate Clements (CB)	6-0/209	12/12/79	6	Ohio State	FA/07	16/16
28	Dashon Goldson (S)	6-2/205	9-18-84	R	Washington	D4b/07	—
37	Walt Harris (CB)	5-11/192	8/10/74	12	Mississippi State	FA/06	15/15
23	Marcus Hudson (CB)	6-2/200	11/15/82	2	N.C. State	D6b/06	16/0
28	Keith Lewis (S)	6-0/202	10/20/81	4	Oregon	D6b/04	16/9
32	Michael Lewis (S)	6-1/211	4/29/80	6	Colorado	FA/07	14/6
26	Mark Roman (S)	5-11/210	3/26/77	8	Louisiana State	FA/06	16/11
36	Shawntae Spencer (CB)	6-1/181	2/22/82	4	Pittsburgh	D2b/04	13/13
20	Donald Strickland (CB)	5-10/187	11/24/80	5	Colorado	FA/06	3/3
22	B.J. Tucker (CB)	5-10/188	10/12/80	3	Wisconsin	FA/05	4/1
SPECIALISTS							
4	Andy Lee (P)	6-0/206	8/11/82	4	Pittsburgh	D6/04	16/0
6	Joe Nedney (K)	6-5/225	3/22/73	11	San Jose State	FA/05	16/0

Abbreviations: D1—draft pick, first round; W—claimed on waivers; T—obtained in trade; FA—free-agent acquisition.



# SEAHAWKS

**Reality check: Once super, this team needs to be healthier, much more committed—and a whole lot better**

**SN PICK** 2nd, NFC West (10-6)

By CLARE FARNSWORTH

**F**resh off their first appearance in the Super Bowl, the Seahawks were slapped back to reality in 2006.

They lost too many key players to injuries, won too few games and were eliminated in the second round of the playoffs. To rebound and put themselves back in the Super Bowl picture, the Seahawks have to be healthier—and better. Last year, their best players didn't have their best seasons.

"We have to recapture that feeling where every time we take the field we believe we're going to win," quarterback Matt Hasselbeck says. "That involves everyone on this team finding a way to play better, starting with me."

That, indeed, will be the key to the Seahawks remaining a power player in the NFC.

## OFFENSE

Coach Mike Holmgren believes it is easier to complete a 6-yard pass than to break a 6-yard run, so he generally favors throwing the ball about 60 percent of the time. But that philosophy regularly gets tweaked when you have Shaun Alexander in the backfield. Holmgren and coordinator Gil Haskell often wrestle with the right pass-run mix for this team.

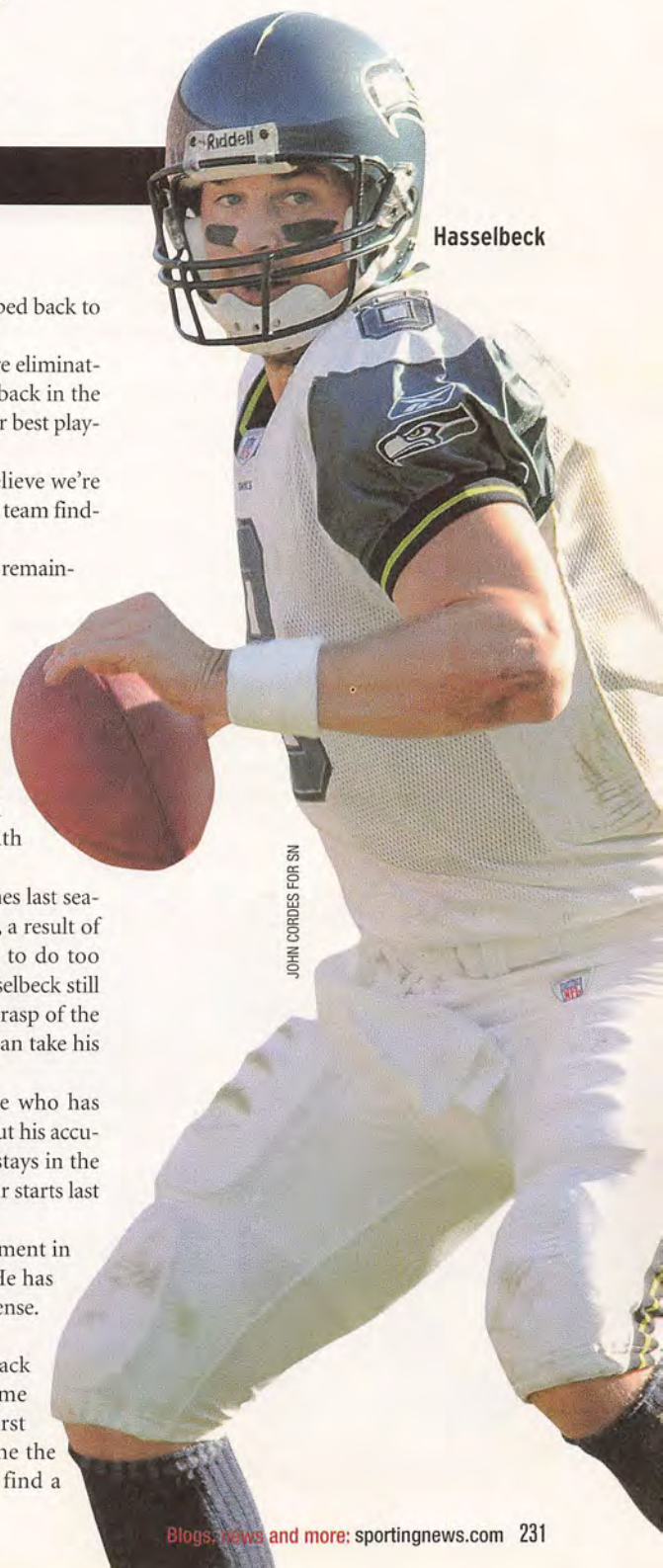
**Quarterbacks**—Hasselbeck missed four games last season and also missed throws and opportunities, a result of not always reading the field well and trying to do too much as the injuries on offense mounted. Hasselbeck still can take over a game, and he has an excellent grasp of the system. But when he presses, Hasselbeck also can take his team out of a game.

Backup Seneca Wallace is a superb athlete who has made impressive strides. He has a strong arm, but his accuracy runs hot and cold, particularly when he stays in the pocket. His limitations were apparent in his four starts last season.

David Greene needs to show more development in his third season than he did in his first two. He has struggled to get a firm grasp of Holmgren's offense.

**GRADE: B**

**Running backs**—Alexander is the type of back who gets better with more carries as the game progresses. He may gain minimal yards the first two times a play is run, then break a long one the third time. He likes to glide along the line, find a



Hasselbeck

## SCHEDULE

All times Eastern

Sept. 9	TAMPA BAY	4:15
Sept. 16	at Arizona	4:05
Sept. 23	CINCINNATI	4:05
Sept. 30	at San Francisco	4:05
Oct. 7	at Pittsburgh	1:00
Oct. 14	NEW ORLEANS	8:15
Oct. 21	ST. LOUIS	4:15
Oct. 28	Open date	
Nov. 4	at Cleveland	4:05
Nov. 12	SAN FRANCISCO*	8:30
Nov. 18	CHICAGO	8:15
Nov. 25	at St. Louis	1:00
Dec. 2	at Philadelphia	1:00
Dec. 9	ARIZONA	4:05
Dec. 16	at Carolina	1:00
Dec. 23	BALTIMORE	4:15
Dec. 30	at Atlanta	1:00

Strength of schedule: 24th

\*Monday

Analysis of every Seahawks game:  
sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom

## REGULAR-SEASON WINS





crease and slide through it. This style was wildly productive before last season, when the line was not as overpowering. Too often in 2006, the team got stuffed in short-yardage situations.

Maurice Morris, who had back-to-back 100-yard games last season as a fill-in for Alexander, has good speed and elusiveness but is small and can't grind out yards. He again will serve as the backup and third-down back. He is a willing blocker but can be a liability in blitz pickup.

Fullback Mack Strong, who is returning for his 15th season, remains a dependable lead blocker, though he was used too much as a runner and receiver when Alexander was out and wore down late. The return of versatile Leonard Weaver from an ankle injury will help keep Strong fresh. **GRADE: B**

**Receivers**—The trade of Darrell Jackson to the 49ers left Hasselbeck without his go-to target. Deion Branch will move into the flanker spot, which is featured a lot in this system.

Branch was a clutch performer for the Patriots but failed to click with Hasselbeck after being acquired in a trade last year. The same could be said of No. 4 receiver Nate Burleson during his first year with the team. It's essential both develop a better rapport with their quarterback. Branch's quickness and athleticism make him a nice fit in the West Coast scheme and help compensate for his lack of size.

D.J. Hackett will take over at split end after having something of a breakout season. Hackett has good size and has shown flashes of big-play ability in situational roles. He must step up to compensate for some of the productivity lost with the departure of Jackson.

Bobby Engram returns as the slot receiver. Like Branch and Burleson, Engram possesses quickness and elusiveness to get open and make plays after the catch—a key to Holmgren's system. However, this unit turned few 6-yard completions into 15-yard gains last year.

Free-agent addition Marcus Pollard is 35 but still will be more of a receiving threat at tight end than Jeramy Stevens was last year. The team considered adding its tight end of the future in the draft but didn't find a good fit, so Pollard's backup will be journeyman Will Heller. He has good size (6-6, 265) and will be

## SCOUTING REPORTS: OFFENSE

### Matt Hasselbeck, QB

**Strengths:** Has a powerful arm, gets zip on his downfield passes and can throw into tight spaces. Throws with touch, especially underneath. Accurate and can lead receivers. Has good pocket presence; can roll out and buy time. Shows good awareness as a runner. Plays with intensity and is a leader.

**Weaknesses:** Will press at times and throw into coverage. Can beat the blitz but doesn't always make sound decisions. Loses accuracy when rolling to his left and trying to get the ball downfield. Takes hits he could avoid.

**Bottom line:** Hasselbeck is one of the top 10 quarterbacks in the NFL. **Grade: 8.8**

### Shaun Alexander, RB

**Strengths:** Big, physical, straight-line runner. Has outstanding vision and decisiveness. Very good at hitting the cutback lanes. Reads blocks well, makes quick decisions and wastes little motion. Can wear down defenses. Has another gear in the open field.

**Weaknesses:** Fumble-prone and runs high, which exposes him to big hits. Isn't a short-area explosive player. Needs a seam; won't often create one on his own. Average as a receiver.

**Bottom line:** Though Alexander struggled with injuries in 2006, he will be at full strength for the 2007 season.

Expect him to return to the Pro Bowl. **Grade: 9.2**

### ➔ Mack Strong, FB

**Strengths:** Big and strong. Gets terrific position and leverage on run blocks. Takes great angles and seals off lanes. Reliable short-area receiver.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks burst and agility. Stiff catching on the run and slow getting upfield. No longer excels pushing the pile. Has lost some blocking range.

**Bottom line:** Strong's pass blocking has declined, but he is an adequate lead blocker and short-yardage runner. **Grade: 6.7**

### Deion Branch, WR

**Strengths:** Has excellent speed and runs fluid routes. Adjusts well to bad throws. Has superb acceleration, explodes out of his cuts and is dangerous after the catch. Can separate from man coverage and is outstanding on quick hitches. Competitive on jump balls because of his leaping ability and toughness.

**Weaknesses:** Undersized. Never will be great in the red zone and offers little as a blocker. Durability is a concern.

**Bottom line:** Branch's explosiveness, athleticism and drive are top-notch. He will be the go-to guy in the offense. **Grade: 7.5**

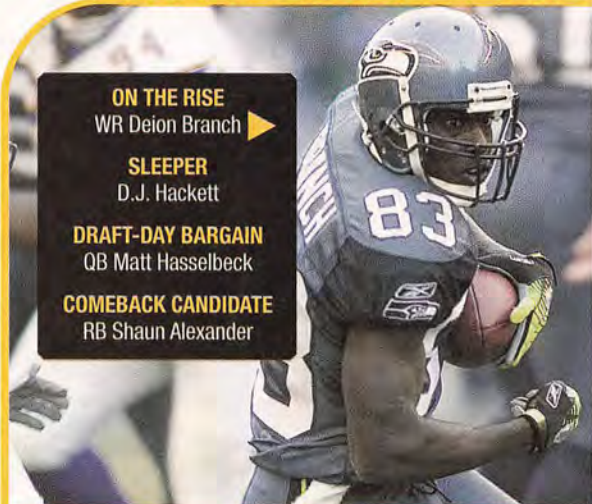
## FANTASY SOURCE PICKS

**ON THE RISE**  
WR Deion Branch ▶

**SLEEPER**  
D.J. Hackett

**DRAFT-DAY BARGAIN**  
QB Matt Hasselbeck

**COMEBACK CANDIDATE**  
RB Shaun Alexander



TOM HAUCK FOR SN

Fantasy Source Football is your online fantasy authority. Go to [fantasy.sportingnews.com/nfl](http://fantasy.sportingnews.com/nfl).

Alexander



JAY DROWINS / SN



Players are graded by War Room scouts on a 1-10 scale.  
\*Rookies (not graded)

#### ↑ D.J. Hackett, WR

**Strengths:** Big and athletic. Has rare leaping ability and timing. Hands keep improving. Runs with great balance and awareness.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks elusiveness, initial quickness and ideal speed. Struggles to read coverages, find soft spots in zones and set up defenders.

**Bottom line:** Hackett is expected to move to split end, where he can use his size, strength and speed to create mismatches downfield. **Grade: 6.9**

#### ↓ Marcus Pollard, TE

**Strengths:** Has good initial quickness, burst and speed. Gets clean releases off the line and is a crafty route runner. Has an outstanding feel for zone coverage. Big target will shield defenders from the ball. Uses angles and leverage as a blocker.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks elite blocking size and strength. Has lost a step and no longer is a consistent vertical threat.

**Bottom line:** Pollard still is a valuable receiver and a serviceable position blocker, but he is on the downside of his career. **Grade: 6.4**

#### Walter Jones, T

**Strengths:** Has an ideal combination of size and athleticism. Plays with balance, uses good footwork and rarely is beaten by double moves. Takes great angles and wastes little motion getting position. Plays with a good base and anchors well against the bull rush. Has the long arms to ride explosive edge rushers past the pocket.

**Weaknesses:** Not a dominant run blocker. Doesn't consistently move the pile or work to finish blocks with authority. Could stand to be more aggressive. Hasn't always kept himself in ideal shape.

**Bottom line:** Jones is the best tackle in the business. **Grade: 9.5**

#### Sean Locklear, T

**Strengths:** Quick, athletic and rangy. Can pull, trap and hit the moving target effectively. Fires out of his stance and plays with good leverage. Delivers a powerful punch and plays with a good base. Mirrors pass rushers' moves effectively.

**Weaknesses:** Must add more bulk and improve his technique. Needs to work on his hand placement and blocking angles and position.

**Bottom line:** Locklear stepped up his

game big-time and took hold of the right tackle position. **Grade: 7.3**

#### ↓ Chris Gray, G

**Strengths:** Works to stay in front and sustain his blocks. Has a strong upper body and delivers a violent punch. Uses good hand placement to control defenders.

**Weaknesses:** Vulnerable to double moves and won't regularly move the pile.

**Bottom line:** Gray is a savvy veteran who still can contribute but is on the downside of his career. **Grade: 6.5**

#### Floyd Womack, G

**Strengths:** Massive player can wear down defenders. Drives through blocks and pushes the pile. Takes good angles and usually gets position.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal lateral mobility and initial quickness. Struggles to protect the inside gap. Weight, conditioning and durability are issues.

**Bottom line:** Womack has had injury and stamina concerns his entire career. He can't be counted on until he proves he can stay on the field. **Grade: 6.5**

#### Rob Sims, G

**Strengths:** Strong and tough; has good bulk. Shows good blitz and stunt awareness. Has quick feet and strong hands. Works hard to finish blocks.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks bulk and power. Works less effectively in the open field. Doesn't overwhelm defenders at the point of attack; can't knock them back, either.

**Bottom line:** Though concerns about his size and unrealized potential caused him to slide in the 2006 draft, he has developed nicely and will have a chance to start on the left side. **Grade: 6.3**

#### ↑ Chris Spencer, C

**Strengths:** Has good size and excellent mobility. Has a strong upper body, a powerful punch and quick setup in pass protection. Intelligent and has excellent intangibles.

**Weaknesses:** Raw and must improve his technique, particularly in pass protection.

**Bottom line:** Spencer is a good, young player who has smarts, athletic ability and a strong work ethic. **Grade: 6.8**

**KEY:** ↑ Ascending ↓ Descending

## INSIDERS POLL

Matt Hasselbeck's mediocre, injury-riddled 2006 season was:

A one-year aberration

A sign of decline



Based on a poll of SN's 32 team correspondents

## BOLD PREDICTIONS

**1** RB Shaun Alexander missed six games with a foot injury in 2006 and turns 30 before the regular season starts, but he's far from finished. Expect him to rush for 1,200-plus yards.

**2** Replacing FS Ken Hamlin with Deon Grant and TE Jerramy Stevens with Marcus Pollard will be beneficial. Grant and Pollard are older than Hamlin and Stevens—and steadier.

**3** The offense will feel the loss of C Robbie Tobeck, who retired after 13 seasons—and not just for his physical presence but for his ability to make line calls and presnap adjustments.

used in a blocking role. **GRADE: B-**

**Line**—In 2005, the Seahawks had the most dominant line in the NFL. But last year's line was a unit in transition—and it probably will remain that way this season. The Seahawks have the type of linemen they want—versatile, mobile, agile—but this is not the same group that played together for so long and so well.

At center, Chris Spencer will step in for Robbie Tobeck, who has retired. Spencer is bigger and stronger than Tobeck, but he must do a better job of presnap line calls than he did in the second half of 2006 when Tobeck was injured. Second-year player Rob Sims will try to fill the lingering void created before last season when All-Pro left guard Steve Hutchinson signed with Minnesota. In five starts last season (including two in the playoffs), Sims displayed enough mobility as a run blocker and agility in pass protection to nail down the job.

Right guard remains a question mark, though two familiar figures return: Chris Gray, who survives more on tenacity than strength or quickness, and Floyd "Pork Chop" Womack, who is a versatile wide-body but struggles to stay healthy.

The strength of the unit remains Pro Bowl left tackle Walter Jones, who did not play as well last season as he did in 2005. "Not as well" is a relative term when it comes to Jones, but the offense definitely will need more from him and right tackle Sean Locklear—whose strengths are his solid base and aggressive style—to compensate for inexperience inside.

Ray Willis, who relies more on size than technique, will be the third tackle and also could be in the mix at right guard. Tom

Ashworth, who is smart and relies on angles and positioning, will be the No. 4 tackle. Fourth-round pick Mansfield Wrotto is the backup at left guard. **GRADE: C+**

## DEFENSE

The seasonlong problems for this undersized but aggressive unit were more a case of execution than the schemes devised by coordinator John Marshall and consultant Ray Rhodes. Too often, the players would be in position but fail to make the play. Left end Patrick Kerney and free safety Deon Grant were signed to address two of the biggest concerns: a pass rush that generated only seven sacks in the final seven regular-season games and a last line of defense that was repeatedly burned by deep pass plays and long runs.

**Line**—The Seahawks' small-ball approach starts up front. No slovenly 350-pounders need apply. This defense is patterned after the scheme played by Tampa Bay, where club president Tim Ruskell cut his talent-evaluating teeth before coming to Seattle.

The Seahawks use a liberal rotation system. This year, it will feature light ends Kerney, Bryce Fisher and Darryl Tapp—all relentless workhorses who check in from 265 to 275 pounds—and a high-energy tackle group that tops off with 320-pound Marcus Tubbs and includes Chuck Darby (298), Rocky Bernard (293), Craig Terrill (290) and Russell Davis (310).

The line feeds off Darby, who provides great effort and leadership inside. The team found out about the value of Tubbs, the other starting tackle, last season. In the five games he played, the defense yielded averages of 82 rushing yards and 3.9 yards per carry. In the 11 games he was out because of a knee injury, those averages were 147.2 and 4.8. The rotation couldn't produce an adequate replacement, and the smallish front four got worn down.

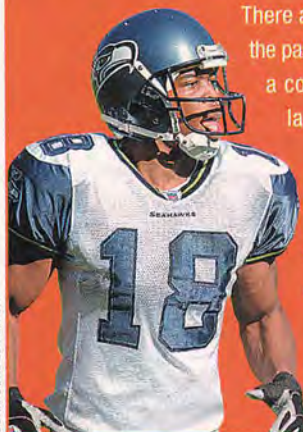
There were similar problems pressuring the quarterback. The Seahawks led the league with 34 sacks after nine games, then failed to produce more than one in six of their final seven games. Again, it was a case of smaller linemen wearing down.

The coaches know they need to rectify both problems, which prompted the signing of Kerney, who plays with quickness and intensity, and the drafting of two players who likely will join the rotation—end Baraka Atkins and tackle Brandon Mebane. To

## SECRET WEAPON

### D.J. HACKETT, WR

There are almost too many hands in the passing game, but Hackett brings a couple of elements the others lack: size (6-2, 199) and sure hands. After a productive season in '06 (45 receptions, four TDs), he is expected to start because of the departure of Darrell Jackson. Hackett is adept at working the middle of the field and elevating to make tough catches.



## SCOUTING REPORTS: DEFENSE

### ↑ Patrick Kerney, E

**Strengths:** Has excellent closing speed and great intensity. Takes good angles, uses his hands to get through traffic quickly and has great range. Has the upper-body strength to maintain separation and the initial burst to put a tackle on his heels. Has an array of pass-rush moves. Plays with good leverage and can collapse the pocket. **Weaknesses:** Lacks lower-body strength, can't anchor against double-teams and wears down when run at consistently.

**Bottom line:** Opponents know Kerney's value. He has a high motor to go with length and quickness. After missing seven games in 2006, he must prove he can stay healthy. **Grade: 8.4**

### Bryce Fisher, E

**Strengths:** Has a good combination of power, athleticism and tenacity. Uses his hands to maintain separation. Mobile and can make plays in space. Has a nonstop motor and effective club and rip moves.

**Weaknesses:** Not a great athlete. Lacks flexibility and change-of-direction ability.

**Bottom line:** Fisher is a try-hard player who understands how to use angles and leverage to get to the ball. **Grade: 6.9**

### ↑ Marcus Tubbs, T

**Strengths:** Has good initial quickness, size, base and strength. Can knock linemen into the backfield or peel off blocks and pursue. Athletic and fast for his size. Closes hard on the ball and can collapse the pocket.

**Weaknesses:** Will get high and lazy when tired. Has conditioning and durability issues. Awareness and recognition skills must improve.

**Bottom line:** Tubbs is a vital piece of Seattle's line puzzle. **Grade: 7.7**

### Rocky Bernard, T

**Strengths:** Quick and explosive. Gets great initial pop and knocks back linemen. Maintains separation, takes good angles and sheds quickly. Can split double-teams as a pass rusher.

**Weaknesses:** Undersized and lacks durability and stamina. Must be on the move or matched up one-on-one to be effective against the run.

**Bottom line:** Bernard must improve his strength and stamina to be a consistent force inside. **Grade: 7.5**

### Chuck Darby, T

**Strengths:** Has good burst, speed and agility. Excels at shooting gaps and penetrating. Gives constant effort. Has a natural body shake as a pass rusher.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal inside power. Won't hold his ground against double-teams and can be engulfed.

**Bottom line:** Darby was a huge pick-up for the Seahawks in 2005, and his work ethic and example make all his teammates better. **Grade: 7.2**

### ↑ Julian Peterson, LB

**Strengths:** Has good quickness and speed and a rare first-step. Best when close to line, where he can use his speed to shoot gaps. Has tremendous closing speed and is a good open-field tackler. Has improved his ability to read blocks and take good angles. Can turn and run with tight ends and backs.

**Weaknesses:** Durability is a concern. Opponents can take him out of his game by running right at him. Relies on his natural ability to avoid contact and lacks the bulk to stack and shed. Must improve recognition skills.

**Bottom line:** Peterson is a supreme athlete who can be a game-changer. **Grade: 8.5**

### ↑ Lofa Tatupu, LB

**Strengths:** Plays smart, tough and with great instincts. Natural leader who takes charge of the huddle. Attacks the line and is good with his hands. Has good balance and agility and a high motor. Takes great angles.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks bulk and speed. Can be engulfed at the point of attack and washed down the line of scrimmage.

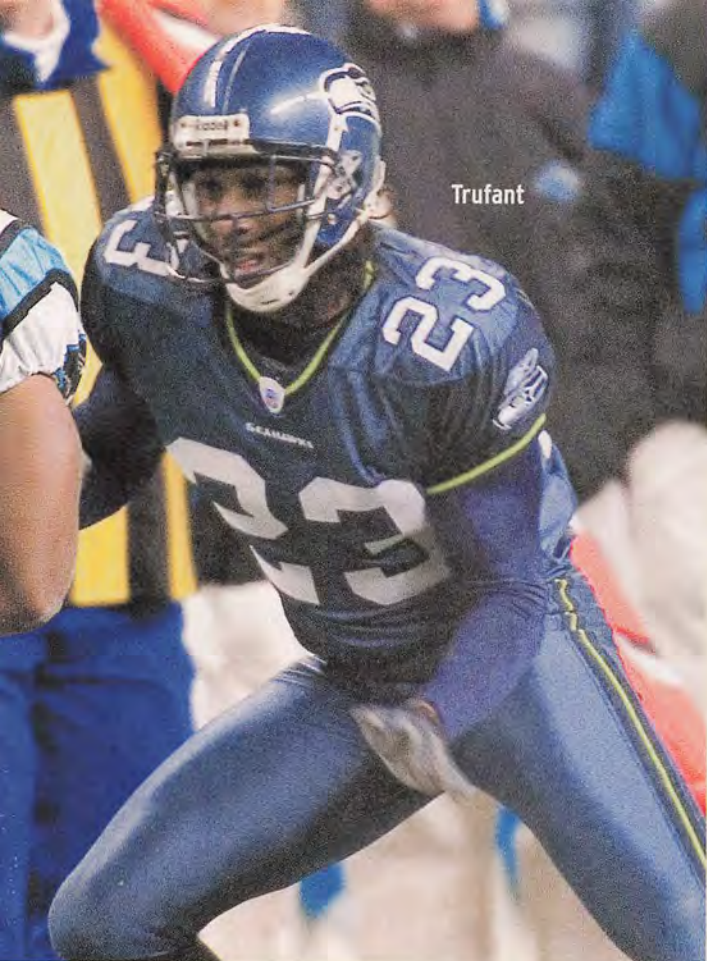
**Bottom line:** Tatupu does not look impressive in pads, but he makes plays all over the field and is on the rise. **Grade: 8.0**

### ↑ LeRoy Hill, LB

**Strengths:** Plays beyond his age in terms of read-and-reaction ability. Has good range in both the running and passing games. Plays with good pad level. Smart in pursuit.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to improve his strength and must learn to stick and move instead of giving up his body on the blocker.

**Bottom line:** Hill is instinctive and an excellent athlete. He defends the run well and has the athletic ability to play in coverage. **Grade: 7.4**



Trufant

JAY DROWINS / SN

**Marcus Trufant, CB**

**Strengths:** Strong and athletic. Has fluid hips, a quick pedal and great balance. Smooth in transition and fast enough to turn and run with most receivers. Has excellent leaping ability and ball skills and fills hard against the run.

**Weaknesses:** Occasionally fooled. Must make quicker reads. Will get out of position and open his hips early. Lacks elite size.

**Bottom line:** Trufant is a solid player but hasn't developed as quickly as expected. **Grade: 7.5**

**↑ Kelly Jennings, CB**

**Strengths:** A natural athlete and coverage man. Easily recognizes routes. Wins jump balls and knocks down passes. Backpedals smoothly and shows a good burst forward to the ball. Easily turns and runs with receivers. Has decent recovery speed. Good open-field tackler.

**Weaknesses:** Must get bigger and stronger. Will struggle to shed run blockers. Must improve his technique in press coverage and become more physical.

**Bottom line:** Jennings has the speed to be an NFL starter, but he must get stronger and more aggressive. **Grade: 7.1**

**Deon Grant, S**

**Strengths:** Has excellent size and is a smooth, fluid athlete. Quick enough to play in the slot. Hits hard. Plays under control in space and can cover ground in center field. Has long arms.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks top instincts, and sometimes the game seems too fast for him. Vulnerable to double moves because he gambles. Not as aggressive as he should be in the box.

**Bottom line:** Grant has good size, speed and range, but his lack of instincts keeps him from being a top playmaker. **Grade: 7.0**

**↓ Brian Russell, S**

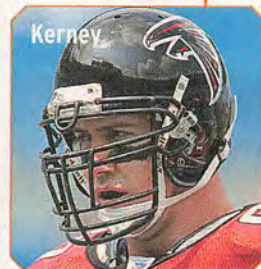
**Strengths:** Always puts himself in good position. Has excellent recognition skills, gets nice jumps on balls and takes good angles. Outstanding open-field tackler. Can be effective covering the deep half.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal size and speed. Will gamble to compensate for so-so range. Had nine interceptions in 2003 but has produced only five since then.

**Bottom line:** Russell has limitations but is a solid defender who should earn the Seahawks' starting strong safety job. **Grade: 6.8**

**SCOUT TAKES****A scout from another team sizes up the Seahawks**

They're still the best team in the division. They're well-coached and have enough playmakers on both sides of the ball to win in clutch situations. ... I like the acquisition of **Patrick Kerney** if he stays healthy. That's another explosive guy coming off the edge. He's not the biggest guy, but he's always going 100 mph. ... **Shaun Alexander** isn't showing any signs of decline. He doesn't have great speed, but oddly enough, he comes up with a lot of long runs because his instincts and his eyes are so good. ... **Deon Grant** gives them a calming presence as well as a playmaker in center field. He's a smart guy as far as getting people lined up. And he's not afraid to come up and hit people. ... Is their defensive line too small? I don't know. That's kind of the theory the Colts have, and it worked out all right for them.



Kerney

BOB LEVERONE / SN

accommodate the addition of Kerney, Fisher is moving from left to right end. He needs to produce more than the four sacks he put up last year—especially considering he will be lining up at the key pass-rushing spot. **GRADE: C+**

**Linebackers**—The smaller-but-faster approach carries over to this unit, which features middle linebacker Lofa Tatupu flanked by Julian Peterson and Leroy Hill. Productivity is not a problem here.

Last season, Tatupu led the club with 123 tackles and went to the Pro Bowl; Peterson posted a career-high 10 sacks and also went to the Pro Bowl; and Hill had 92 tackles and flashed Pro Bowl potential. Individually, they possess the speed and instincts to make plays in all phases of the game—and all over the field. Collectively, they are as athletic as any linebacking crew in the league.

The biggest problem is figuring out how to make the best use of this trio's impressive talents. Peterson can step to the line as a pass-rushing end in the nickel, but that also creates predictability. Hill had seven sacks as a rookie in '05 but wasn't allowed to blitz as often last season. Tatupu is the king of versatility but needs the tackles to keep blockers off him.

Versatility and athleticism also define the key backups: Kevin Bentley, a savvy veteran who can play any of the three positions; and Lance Laury, who was added to the active roster midway through last season after beginning his rookie year on the practice squad. **GRADE: B+**

**Secondary**—Jim Mora, the new secondary coach, has significant challenges. But, then, that's why the former Falcons head coach was hired.

In particular, Mora needs to reduce the number of big plays and coax better play from former high draft picks such as left cornerback Marcus Trufant, who has not developed into the shutdown corner the club envisioned when it made him the 11th overall pick in 2003.

Kelly Jennings, last year's first-round pick, did not displace

veteran corner Kelly Herndon as anticipated in '06, but Jennings has a good shot at winning the starting right corner job this year. At 5-11, 178, Jennings lacks size—his teammates appropriately call him “Slim”—and tackling pop, but the coaches like his speed, closing burst and coverage skills.

Look for rookie Josh Wilson, a second-round pick, to challenge Herndon for the nickel job. Herndon still is recovering from the ankle he fractured in the season finale, and it will be difficult for him to hold off the speedy Wilson.

Grant was signed to replace free safety Ken Hamlin, a free-agent defector, and Brian Russell was added to challenge Michael Boulware for the strong safety spot. Last season, Hamlin wasn't adequate as the last line of defense and did a poor job of communicating before the snap. So the team signed former Jaguar Grant, who is adept at getting the secondary aligned properly and has some playmaking ability.

After the team's May minicamp, Russell had the edge on Boulware at strong safety. Though he might not have ideal speed, Russell has the savvy to keep plays in front of him and the coverage skills to match up with tight ends and slot receivers.

Mora inherits some versatility and talent in his backups. Jordan Babineaux is versatile enough to play either cornerback or safety, and Mike Green was considered potential starting material before a preseason foot injury cost him last season. **GRADE: C**

## SPECIAL TEAMS

Burleson was a disappointment as a receiver but did provide something that was missing on special teams: an aggressive punt and kickoff returner capable of making big plays. Given the role at midseason, he responded by averaging 24.7 yards on kickoffs and 9.5 yards on punts (including a 90-yarder for a score). This season, the kickoff-return duties could go to Wilson, who excelled in that role at Maryland.

The Seahawks have one of the better clutch kickers in Josh Brown, who tied an NFL record last season by hitting four game-winning field goals in the final minute of games. After a shaky—and at times shanky—start to his rookie season, punter Ryan Plackemeier settled in to post a 45-yard average. A season-ending injury to veteran snapper J.P. Darche forced the signing of Derek Rackley, and the club decided to stay with him.

New special teams coach Bruce DeHaven inherits a good group of core coverage players led by Bentley, Laury

## STADIUM/MEDIA

Qwest Field (67,000, artificial)

Tickets: 800-635-4295

Training site: Eastern Washington University, Cheney, Wash.; 425-827-9777

Radio: KIRO-AM (710)

Website: seahawks.com

and linebacker Niko Koutouvides. **GRADE: B-**

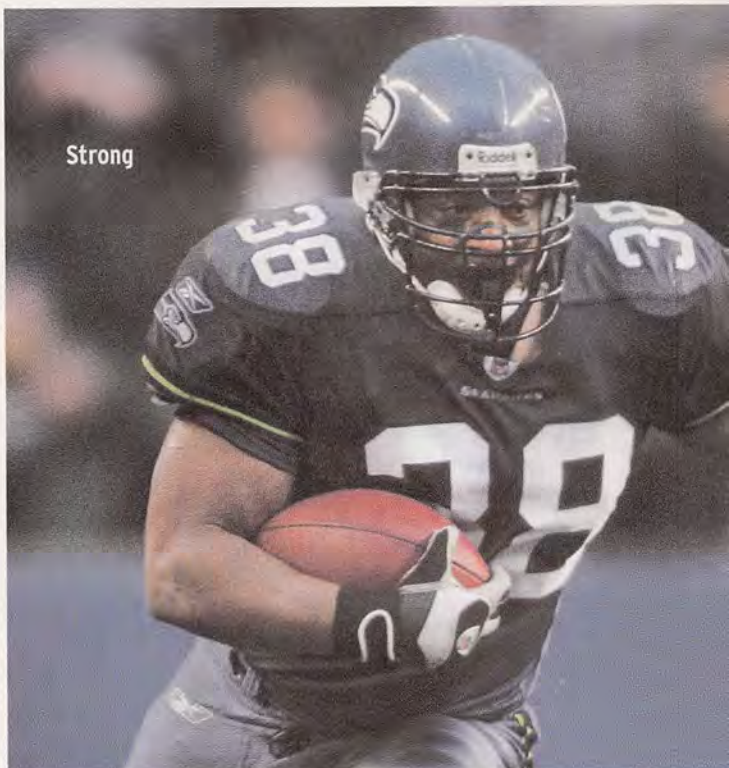
## BOTTOM LINE

The days of dominating the NFC West appear to be over for this team, but the road to the division title still runs through Seattle—and raucous Qwest Field. Last season's 9-7 record was a disappointment, but it also provided a needed wakeup call.

No one is going to give the Seahawks anything. But they still have plenty of offensive firepower and have made enough changes on defense to win 10 games. Not only is that playoff-worthy in the NFC, it might even merit a home game in the first round. **SN**

*Clare Farnsworth covers the Seahawks for the Seattle Post-Intelligencer.*

Strong



## KEY MOVES

### 2007 DRAFT PICKS

Rd./Pick

**GRADE C**

**2-55 Josh Wilson, CB, Maryland**

Lacks ideal size but compensates by being extremely competitive.

**3-85 Brandon Mebane, DT, California**

A big body who will be used as part of the tackle rotation.

**4-120 Baraka Atkins, DE, Miami**

Fast for his size (271 pounds); could be part of the rotation.

**4-124 Mansfield Wrotto, G, Georgia Tech**

There are guys ahead of him, so he'll have time to develop.

**5-161 Will Herring, LB, Auburn**

A high-rev linebacker who can cover and hit.

**6-197 Courtney Taylor, WR, Auburn**

Could have a hard time making the roster; team is stacked at wideout.

**6-210 Jordan Kent, WR, Oregon**

Fast and athletic but didn't start playing football until 2005.

**7-232 Steve Vallos, G, Wake Forest**

Is undersized; players ahead of him have talent and experience.

## VETERAN PLAYERS

**Additions:** S Deon Grant (FA/Jaguars), DE Patrick Kerney (FA/Falcons), TE Marcus Pollard (FA/Lions), S Brian Russell (FA/Browns).

**Losses:** S Ken Hamlin (FA/Cowboys), WR Darrell Jackson (trade/49ers), TE Jeramy Stevens (FA/Buccaneers), C Robbie Tobeck (retired), DE Grant Wistrom (FA).



## PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
QB	■ Matt Hasselbeck ● Seneca Wallace	LE	■ Patrick Kerney □ Baraka Atkins
FB	■ Mack Strong ● Leonard Weaver	LT	■ Chuck Darby □ Brandon Mebane
RB	▲ Shaun Alexander ● Maurice Morris	RT	■ Marcus Tubbs ● Rocky Bernard
WR	■ Deion Branch ■ Bobby Engram	RE	■ Bryce Fisher ■ Darryl Tapp
WR	■ D.J. Hackett ● Nate Burleson	SLB	▲ Julian Peterson ● Kevin Bentley
TE	● Marcus Pollard ● Will Heller	MLB	▲ Lofa Tatupu □ Niko Koutouvides
LT	▲ Walter Jones ● Ray Willis	WLB	■ Leroy Hill □ Lance Laury
LG	● Rob Sims □ Mansfield Wrotto	LCB	■ Marcus Trufant ● Kelly Herndon
C	● Chris Spencer ■ Chris Gray	SS	■ Brian Russell ● Michael Boulware
RG	■ Chris Gray ● Floyd Womack	FS	■ Deon Grant ● Mike Green
RT	■ Sean Locklear ● Ray Willis	RCB	● Kelly Jennings ● Josh Wilson

## SPECIALISTS

K	▲ Josh Brown	KR	● Josh Wilson
P	■ Ryan Plackemeier	PR	■ Nate Burleson
		LS	● Derek Rackley
	▲ Elite ■ Solid		● Adequate □ Injure

Depth charts updated weekly at [sportingnews.com](http://sportingnews.com)

## SEAHAWKS ROSTER

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL exp.	College	How acq.	2006 GP/GS
QUARTERBACKS							
11	David Greene	6-3/226	6/22/82	3	Georgia	D3a/05	0/0
8	Matt Hasselbeck	6-4/223	9/25/75	9	Boston College	T-GB/01	12/12
7	Travis Lulay	6-2/216	9/27/83	1	Montana State	FA/07	0/0
15	Seneca Wallace	5-11/196	8/6/80	5	Iowa State	D4a/03	8/4
RUNNING BACKS							
37	Shaun Alexander	5-11/225	8/30/77	8	Alabama	D1a/00	10/10
34	David Kirtman (FB)	6-0/232	2/12/83	2	USC	D5/06	0/0
20	Maurice Morris	5-11/202	12/1/79	6	Oregon	D2a/02	16/8
49	Josh Parry (FB)	6-2/250	4/5/78	4	San Jose State	T-Phi/06	8/0
38	Mack Strong (FB)	6-0/245	9/11/71	15	Georgia	FA/93	16/10
43	Leonard Weaver (FB)	6-0/251	9/23/82	3	Carson-Newman	FA/05	0/0
30	Marquis Weeks	5-10/216	10/2/80	2	Virginia	FA/05	10/0
RECEIVERS							
83	Deion Branch	5-9/193	7/18/79	6	Louisville	T-NE/06	14/13
81	Nate Burleson	6-0/192	8/19/81	5	Nevada	FA/06	16/7
84	Bobby Engram	5-10/188	1/7/73	12	Penn State	FA/01	7/6
18	D.J. Hackett	6-2/199	7/31/81	3	Colorado	FA/05	14/5
85	Will Heller (TE)	6-6/265	2/28/81	5	Georgia Tech	FA/06	16/0
16	Chris Jones	6-3/203	7/17/82	1	Jackson State	FA/07	0/0
47	Ben Joppur (TE)	6-4/242	1/5/80	5	Michigan	FA/06	6/0
82	Jordan Kent	6-4/217	7/24/84	R	Oregon	D6b/07	—
87	Ben Obomanu	6-1/205	10/30/83	2	Auburn	D7b/06	0/0
88	Marcus Pollard (TE)	6-3/247	2/8/72	13	Bradley	FA/07	15/5
89	Leonard Stephens (TE)	6-3/250	7/9/78	3	Howard	FA/06	0/0
86	Courtney Taylor	6-1/204	4/7/84	R	Auburn	D6a/07	—
OFFENSIVE LINEMEN							
68	Tom Ashworth (T)	6-6/305	10/10/77	6	Colorado	FA/06	16/6
62	Chris Gray (G)	6-3/308	6/19/70	15	Auburn	FA/98	15/15
71	Walter Jones (T)	6-5/308	1/19/74	11	Florida State	D1b/97	16/16
64	Austin King (C)	6-3/288	4/11/81	5	Northwestern	FA/07	14/0
75	Sean Locklear (T)	6-3/301	5/29/81	4	N.C. State	D3/04	11/10
73	Steve Morley (G)	6-7/330	8/18/81	3	St. Mary's (Canada)	FA/06	0/0
48	Derek Rackley (LS)	6-4/250	7/18/77	8	Minnesota	FA/06	15/0
67	Rob Sims (G)	6-4/307	12/6/83	2	Ohio State	D4/06	14/3
65	Chris Spencer (G/C)	6-3/308	3/28/82	3	Mississippi	D1/05	16/13
69	Steve Vallos (G)	6-3/290	12/28/83	R	Wake Forest	D7/07	—
74	Ray Willis (T)	6-6/325	8/13/82	3	Florida State	D4/05	1/0
77	Floyd Womack (G/T)	6-4/333	11/15/78	7	Mississippi State	D4c/01	9/9
66	Mansfield Wrotto (G)	6-3/310	10/12/84	R	Georgia Tech	D4b/07	—
DEFENSIVE LINEMEN							
96	Baraka Atkins (E)	6-4/271	8/28/84	R	Miami	D4a/07	—
99	Rocky Bernard (T)	6-3/293	4/19/79	6	Texas A&M	D5a/02	16/15
91	Chuck Darby (T)	6-0/298	10/22/75	7	South Carolina St.	FA/05	16/14
95	Russell Davis (T)	6-4/310	3/28/75	9	North Carolina	FA/06	13/0
94	Bryce Fisher (E)	6-3/272	5/12/77	7	Air Force	FA/05	16/16
70	Brandon Green (E)	6-3/264	9/5/80	4	Rice	FA/07	13/5
97	Patrick Kerney (E)	6-5/273	12/30/76	9	Virginia	FA/07	9/9
92	Brandon Mebane (T)	6-1/309	1/15/85	R	California	D3/07	—
55	Darryl Tapp (E)	6-1/265	9/13/84	2	Virginia Tech	D2/06	16/0
92	Eric Taylor (T)	6-2/305	12/14/81	2	Memphis	FA/06	0/0
93	Craig Terrill (T)	6-3/290	6/27/80	4	Purdue	D6/04	11/0
90	Marcus Tubbs (T)	6-3/320	5/16/81	4	Texas	D1/04	5/2
LINEBACKERS							
57	Kevin Bentley	6-1/240	12/29/79	6	Northwestern	FA/05	14/0
58	Marquis Cooper	6-3/213	3/11/82	4	Washington	FA/06	4/0
54	Will Herring	6-3/221	8/28/83	R	Auburn	D5/07	—
56	Leroy Hill	6-1/229	9/14/82	3	Clemson	D3b/05	15/15
53	Niko Koutouvides	6-2/238	3/25/81	4	Purdue	D4/04	16/0
50	Lance Laury	6-2/233	1/17/82	2	South Carolina	FA/06	8/0
59	Julian Peterson	6-3/235	7/28/78	8	Michigan State	FA/06	16/16
51	Lofa Tatupu	6-0/240	11/15/82	3	USC	D2/05	16/16
DEFENSIVE BACKS							
27	Jordan Babineaux (S)	6-0/200	8/31/82	4	Southern Arkansas	FA/04	15/8
28	Michael Boulware (S)	6-2/223	9/17/81	4	Florida State	D2/04	16/8
26	Rich Gardner (CB)	5-10/194	2/1/81	4	Penn State	FA/06	0/0
24	Deon Grant (S)	6-2/210	3/14/79	8	Tennessee	FA/07	16/16
42	Mike Green (S)	6-0/195	12/6/76	8	Northwestern St.	T-Phi/06	0/0
31	Kelly Herndon (CB)	5-10/180	11/3/76	6	Toledo	FA/05	16/16
29	Pete Hunter (CB)	6-2/208	5/25/80	5	Virginia Union	FA/06	0/0
21	Kelly Jennings (CB)	5-10/178	11/30/82	2	Miami	D1/06	16/2
35	Gerard Ross (CB)	6-1/200	12/27/82	2	Florida State	FA/06	0/0
25	Brian Russell (S)	6-2/204	2/5/78	6	San Diego State	FA/05	12/12
23	Marcus Trufant (CB)	5-11/199	12/25/80	5	Washington State	D1/03	15/15
26	Josh Wilson (CB)	5-9/189	3/11/85	R	Maryland	D2/07	—
SPECIALISTS							
3	Josh Brown (K)	6-0/202	4/29/79	5	Nebraska	D7/03	16/0
1	Ryan Plackemeier (P)	6-3/253	3/5/84	2	Wake Forest	D7a/06	—

Abbreviations: D1-draft pick, first round; W-claimed on waivers; T-obtained in trade; FA-free-agent acquisition.



TAMPA BAY

NFC

# BUCS

**If Gruden doesn't rediscover his offensive magic, another season—and his job—could go poof**

**SN PICK** 4th, NFC South (5-11)

By ROY CUMMINGS

**F**ive years after leading the Bucs to their only Super Bowl title, coach Jon Gruden is on the verge of losing his reputation as an offensive mastermind—and maybe his job.

Gruden is under fire largely because of his team's recent offensive failures. Though he came to Tampa with a reputation as an offensive genius, his unit has ranked 22nd, 23rd and 29th the past three seasons.

Counting last year's 4-12 disaster, the Bucs have missed the playoffs three of the past four seasons. Gruden's predecessor, Tony Dungy, was fired after years of success, so it figures that Gruden needs to produce this year or else.

The good news is that Gruden has found a potential savior in quarterback Jeff Garcia, who resurrected his career by leading the Eagles to the playoffs last season. The bad news is that the offense, aside from the new quarterback, is short on experience. In time, with young players such as running back Cadillac Williams, wide receiver Michael Clayton and tight end Alex Smith, the Bucs figure to have an effective unit. The question is: Will Gruden be around to see it reach fruition?

## OFFENSE

The offense is built to run the ball, but Gruden would rather throw it, no matter the conditions. Last season, on a terribly windy day at Giants Stadium, Gruden dialed up 52 pass plays for rookie quarterback Bruce Gradkowski—and the results were disastrous. The coach needs to play to his strengths. That means using Williams more as a runner and a receiver, giving more carries to backup Michael Pittman and fullback Mike Alstott and perhaps leaning on Garcia as his starter.

**Quarterbacks**—Chris Simms has suffered season-ending injuries twice in the past three seasons. Those health issues—and Simms' slow start in 2006—are why Garcia was brought in.

Not only do the Bucs need insurance for Simms, they also need someone to push him—and Garcia can do that. Garcia is a perfect fit for Gruden's version

## SCHEDULE

All times Eastern

Sept. 9	at Seattle	4:15
Sept. 16	NEW ORLEANS	1:00
Sept. 23	ST. LOUIS	1:00
Sept. 30	at Carolina	4:05
Oct. 7	at Indianapolis	4:05
Oct. 14	TENNESSEE	1:00
Oct. 21	at Detroit	1:00
Oct. 28	JACKSONVILLE	4:05
Nov. 4	ARIZONA	1:00
Nov. 11	Open date	
Nov. 18	at Atlanta	1:00
Nov. 25	WASHINGTON	1:00
Dec. 2	at New Orleans	1:00
Dec. 9	at Houston	1:00
Dec. 16	ATLANTA	1:00
Dec. 23	at San Francisco	8:15
Dec. 30	CAROLINA	1:00

Strength of schedule: T-27th  
Analysis of every Buccaneers game:  
[sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom](http://sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom)

## REGULAR-SEASON WINS





Cadillac Williams

of the West Coast scheme. He still can escape the pocket and scramble for yards, and he has pinpoint accuracy. He doesn't have a big arm like Simms, but even Simms admits he doesn't have Garcia's savvy.

That experience is why Garcia is a good bet to emerge as the Week 1 starter. With Simms waiting in the wings, the Bucs seem well-positioned for the short and long term. Gradkowski enters camp as the No. 3, but he must outplay Luke McCown to keep the job. **GRADE: C+**

**Running backs**—Williams is the type of back who gets stronger as the game progresses and defenses grow weary. But because the team usually was behind in the second half—and because of Gruden's preference to pass—Williams was robbed of late-game carries and yards in 2006.

The slip in production and Williams' late-season foot injury have left some to wonder whether he is indeed the franchise back he was touted to be. The Bucs, however, remain convinced that he is a game-breaker who can handle the pounding. He better be, because the Bucs don't have anyone of consequence in reserve.

Pittman is a competent runner and pass catcher, but he's 32 and has never been a player defenses had to game-plan for. Earnest Graham doesn't scare anybody, either.

Williams and the Bucs agree that he usually doesn't hit his groove until after 10 or 12 carries, so it's imperative that Gruden commit to the running game and roll with Cadillac. Williams, who dropped several balls in critical situations last season, can help by improving his receiving skills. Keeping Williams on the field on third down is a key to success for the Bucs, but he must prove he can be a reliable target.

Alstott again will lead the way for Williams, and he likely will get a lot of short-yardage and goal-line carries. Alstott is the

## SCOUT TAKES

### A scout from another team sizes up the Bucs

Every year, it seems they get smaller and smaller on that defensive front—and I think they struggle with the run, especially late in games or late in the season. ... **Jeff**

**Garcia** is 37 and has questions. Can he hold up as a 16-game starter? Can he constantly throw deep? I don't think he can do those things. That said, I think he's a good short-term fit for their offense. ... They did a wise thing by extending **Joey Galloway's** contract and bumping up his pay. He's still someone you have to account for. He has the speed to get by you if you guess or get fooled. ... Some people are saying **Brian Kelly** is a better cornerback than **Ronde Barber**, but I'm not a believer. Is Barber still a Pro Bowl player? Probably not. But he still plays at a high level. ... If you read between the lines, it seems like **Jon Gruden** is just not a huge **Chris Simms** fan. I really don't know why.

Garcia





best option in those situations because he still has the power and savvy to get the tough yards. **GRADE: B**

**Receivers**—Joey Galloway still has game-breaking speed, but the quarterbacks couldn't get him the ball consistently last season. As a result, he had a drop-off in catches and yards, though his 17.0 average was tops in the league for receivers with more than 50 catches.

The effects of the quarterback problems were felt through the receiving unit. With defenses loading up at the line, Clayton and Smith had trouble getting involved and neither performed up to expectations. For Clayton, it was his second consecutive disappointing season.

The Bucs once had visions of building their aerial attack around Clayton, but with the emergence late last season of Maurice Stovall, Clayton must fight to remain the starting flanker. The flanker is the key target in the Bucs' passing scheme, and Stovall quickly adapted to the position as a rookie after playing mostly split end at Notre Dame.

Smith will be the primary tight end. He needs to work on his blocking skills, but he is becoming a competent red zone target. Backup Anthony Becht lacks speed but is an adequate blocker and has soft hands. **GRADE: C+**

**Line**—The unit was revamped in the offseason and—if it can overcome health issues—will rank with the most talented in team history. Left tackle Luke Petitgout, 31, and reserve center/guard Matt Lehr, 28, add experience to a young group that struggled to clear running lanes and protect the passer in '06. Those two and longtime center John Wade seldom make mistakes. The Bucs will lean heavily on Petitgout and Wade because they will be surrounded by players who are adjusting to the NFL or to new positions.

Anthony Davis, the starting left tackle the past two seasons, will compete with second-round pick Arron Sears for the left guard job previously held by Dan Buenning. The Bucs plan to move Buenning to center, where he can provide quality depth behind Wade. Davis lacks elite speed, but he's a bulldozer type who helped pave the way for Williams' 2005 rookie of the year season.

## FANTASY SOURCE PICKS

### SLEEPER

WR Maurice Stovall

### STUMBLER

WR Michael Clayton

### MR. RELIABLE

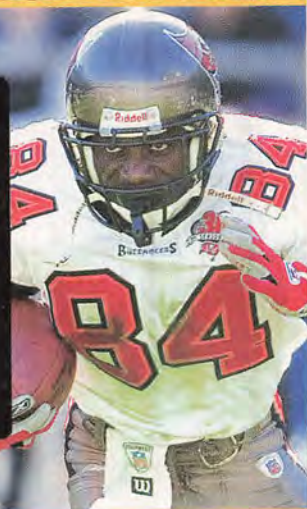
WR Joey Galloway

### COMEBACK CANDIDATE

RB Carnell Williams

### TOP IDP THREAT

CB Ronde Barber



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Go to [fantasy.sportingnews.com/nfl](http://fantasy.sportingnews.com/nfl).

## SCOUTING REPORTS: OFFENSE

### Chris Simms, QB

**Strengths:** A lefthander with a quick release and an effortless throwing motion. Has excellent mechanics and throws a tight spiral with good touch. Makes good decisions and takes what defenses give him. Stands in the pocket and deliver the ball.

**Weaknesses:** Looks at the primary receiver too early. Gets too many passes batted down. Not a risk taker. Has marginal accuracy on deep balls.

**Bottom line:** After suffering a serious spleen injury last year, Simms will operate more from shotgun formations and benefit from upgrades to the line. **Grade: 7.2**

### Jeff Garcia, QB

**Strengths:** Quick on his feet. Has above-average touch and good accuracy short. A tough competitor with good leadership skills.

**Weaknesses:** Has a weak arm and struggles to throw the ball outside the hashes with any force. Does not throw a spiral; the ball sometimes looks like a punt coming out of his hand.

**Bottom line:** Garcia set the NFL on its ear in 2006 when he stepped in for the injured Donovan McNabb and led the Eagles to the playoffs. He still has playmaking ability and can be a spot starter in the right system. **Grade: 7.0**

### Carnell Williams, RB

**Strengths:** Has good patience and always looks for the cutback lane. Has stop-start ability and runs with power. Shifty in the open field and has above-average speed. Has an outstanding burst to the hole.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to increase bulk and strength. Blocks but would rather get out and into a route.

**Bottom line:** Williams has all the tools to be considered among the top five backs in the NFL, but he must stay healthy long enough to prove it. **Grade: 8.9**

### Mike Alstott, FB

**Strengths:** Has great quickness and very good balance. Uses vision to find the hole and powerful legs to get

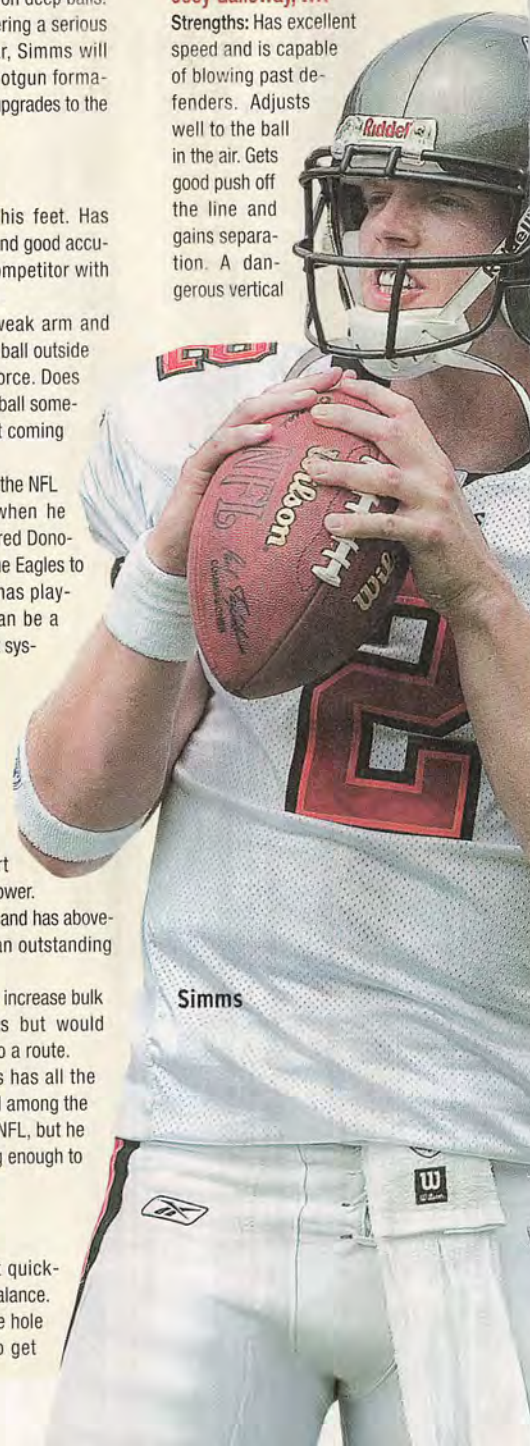
through the seam. Breaks a lot of tackles and is hard bring down.

**Weaknesses:** An angle blocker who can't sustain or dominate.

**Bottom line:** He's listed as a fullback, but he's really a short-yardage running back. He still has the power to pick up tough yards inside. His good hands and leadership ability help his value. **Grade: 6.0**

### Joey Galloway, WR

**Strengths:** Has excellent speed and is capable of blowing past defenders. Adjusts well to the ball in the air. Gets good push off the line and gains separation. A dangerous vertical



Simms



Players are graded by War Room scouts on a 1-10 scale.  
\*Rookies (not graded)

receiver who can find soft spots in zones.

**Weaknesses:** Runs average routes and doesn't give the same effort on plays over the middle. Lack of size can be an issue against more physical defenders. Age and durability are increasing concerns

**Bottom line:** Galloway, who thrives in Jon Gruden's offense, still has great speed and the ability to make game-breaking plays. **Grade: 7.5**

#### ↓ Michael Clayton, WR

**Strengths:** Runs good routes. Gains consistent separation and will find holes against zone coverage. Explosive in and out of cuts and shows no wasted motion.

**Weaknesses:** Not a true deep threat. Drops too many passes. Lacks focus and concentration.

**Bottom line:** Clayton, who has never matched the production he showed as a rookie, has become an afterthought in Tampa's offense.

**Grade: 6.0**

#### Alex Smith, TE

**Strengths:**

Has good mobility and runs efficient routes. Has reliable hands, catches the ball on the run and makes necessary adjustments. Bursts off the line and has good moves to gain separation.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks elite athleticism, speed and strength. Struggles to hold his ground as a blocker.

**Bottom line:** Smith has the tools to be a high-end tight end, but he needs to become more of a playmaker as a receiver. **Grade: 6.9**

#### ↑ Jeremy Trueblood, T

**Strengths:** Has great size, moves very well and finishes blocks. Has a long reach and huge hands. Has a good first step and takes good angles. Not explosive but engulfs defenders. Has a huge wingspan and is surprisingly quick for his size.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks elite athleticism. Must learn to play with better knee bend and leverage. Lets defenders get

under his pads. Struggles against quick ends.

**Bottom line:** Trueblood will do anything to keep his man off the quarterback. But he's a better run blocker than a pass protector. **Grade: 7.8**

#### Luke Petitgout, T

**Strengths:** Has size, quickness and speed. Aggressive and delivers a blow. Comfortable in the open field, pulls effectively and gets downfield quickly for a big man. Can mirror and slide and will redirect inside moves. Uses his hands and arms well. Keeps defenders off-balance with cut blocks. Intelligent and makes few mistakes.

**Weaknesses:** Plays high at times and lacks elite lower-body strength. Can be pushed off-balance by a good bull rush. Doesn't always play with good knee bend or leg drive. Coming off a broken leg.

**Bottom line:** Petitgout, who has the versatility and athleticism to start at either tackle spot, is in the downside of his career. But still, he's a significant upgrade for Tampa Bay's line.

**Grade: 7.5**

#### ↑ Davin Joseph, G

**Strengths:** Has adequate bulk and average height. Plays with leverage and body control. Finishes blocks and plays with a mean streak. Consistently hits moving targets at the second level. Shows natural knee bend and slides smoothly into sets. Mirrors and slides well with pass rushers. Seldom loses a one-on-one matchup.

**Weaknesses:** Doesn't have a big frame. Must improve footwork. Struggles to pick up the blitz.

**Bottom line:** Joseph is a young, aggressive, hard-working lineman who will be a building block for the Bucs in years to come. **Grade: 8.0**

#### John Wade, C

**Strengths:** Has good physical makeup and long arms that help him keep separation. Aggressive and competitive and plays with good instincts. Can play all three line positions.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks power and will get knocked back by bull rushers. Has limited quickness off the snap.

**Bottom line:** Wade never will be a dominant player, but he is smart and competitive and always hustling.

**Grade: 6.2**

**KEY:** ↑ Ascending ↓ Descending

## INSIDERS POLL

The real Cadillac Williams is:

a) The rookie who thrilled

c

24

b) The sophomore who slumped

b

1

c) A back who lies somewhere in between

a

7

Based on a poll of SN's 32 team correspondents

## BOLD PREDICTIONS

1 QB Jeff Garcia will win the starting job and thrive under coach Jon Gruden, for whom he has wanted to play for years.

2 WR Michael Clayton's slide will continue when second-year pro Maurice Stovall proves to be the better option at flanker.

3 Kevin Carter and Greg Spires won't provide a dominant inside pass rush, so the team will keep seeking an under tackle.

Buenning went down last November with an ACL tear, but the Bucs are confident he'll be ready for the start of the season. Health also could be an issue for Petitgout. He missed the final seven games in 2006 with a broken fibula and is at an age (31) when some players start to break down.

The Bucs also have concerns on the right side. Guard Davin Joseph and tackle Jeremy Trueblood are second-year players and the depth behind them—Jeb Terry and Chris Denman—is thin. Joseph and Trueblood showed so much development as road-grading run blockers last season that in the final weeks, the Bucs no longer leaned to the left on offense—they ran as much to the right. But Joseph and Trueblood need to improve their pass-blocking skills. **GRADE: C**

## DEFENSE

The hiring of former Broncos coordinator Larry Coyer as line coach should make the Bucs better up front, and up front is where it all starts in coordinator Monte Kiffin's cover 2 scheme. Kiffin wants most of the pressure on the passer to come from the front four so the back seven can drop into coverage and make it difficult for quarterbacks to find open receivers. Against the run, the team needs a hammer who can come up from the secondary and make hits. The team is hopeful new secondary coach Raheem Morris can coax such physical play from safeties Jermaine Phillips and Will Allen. One significant concern throughout the defense is age. The projected starting lineup includes six players older than 30.

**Line—**Simeon Rice still is one of the game's most disruptive pass rushers, but he'll have to earn playing time this season. With his explosive first step and rare athletic ability, first-round draft pick Gaines Adams is a legitimate option on the right side and provides much-needed youth to an aging unit. Rice is coming off a shoulder injury that kept him out most of last season.

The Bucs plan to use free-agent pickup Kevin Carter, who has played mostly left end in his career, at under tackle and



keep Greg Spires at left end. Spires doesn't have the big-play potential of Rice, Adams or Carter, but if those three draw most of the blocking attention, Spires will get into the backfield and be disruptive against the run and pass.

The additions of Adams and Carter will improve a pass rush that produced only 25 sacks last season. Continued effective play by nose tackle Chris Hovan also would help in that area. If he can regularly draw double-teams, the other linemen will have an easier time getting penetration.

Ellis Wymms and former Chiefs first-round pick Ryan Sims are the top inside reserves. Wymms has the quickness the Bucs want but needs to be stronger against the run. Sims lacks pass-rush skills but might be able to help on run downs. **GRADE: B+**

**Linebackers**—The Bucs revamped this unit in the offseason. Middle linebacker Shelton Quarles was released and strongside backer Ryan Nece was demoted in favor of free-agent acquisition Cato June.

The group still is led by weakside linebacker Derrick Brooks, however. On most Sundays he is the best player on the field. He seldom is out of position and he carries out his assignments extremely well.

Third-year pro Barrett Ruud will replace Quarles. Ruud is solid, particularly against the run, but he's not as sound in coverage as Quarles. If Ruud has trouble against the pass, the Bucs probably will use June in the middle on passing downs to take advantage of his exceptional cover skills. That will allow Nece or fellow backup Jamie Winborn to get on the field. Nece is steady but not much of a playmaker. Winborn is better than Ruud in coverage.

The Bucs also might make greater use of a 3-4 scheme, especially in the nickel. And June can play some at strong safety if there are problems at the position again this season.

This group might have problems against the run, but it will make it very difficult for opponents to convert third downs and keep the ball. **GRADE: B**

**Secondary**—The secondary was one of the Bucs' weakest units last season. The feeling at One Buc Place is that the fiery Morris, who spent several years working under former defensive backs coach and current Steelers coach Mike Tomlin, can light a fire under these guys, in particular Phillips and Allen.

## SECRET WEAPON



### MAURICE STOVALL, WR

Stovall (6-5, 216) is built like a tight end, but he's fast, has great leaping ability and is a good downfield blocker. He plays a little like Randy Moss and Terrell Owens, minus the attitude. Expect Stovall to be busy in the red zone and surprise defenses that focus on stopping Joey Galloway and Michael Clayton.

## SCOUTING REPORTS: DEFENSE

### ↓ Simeon Rice, E

**Strengths:** Has a lot of moves and generally wins one-on-one matchups. Has great range and gets good separation. Explodes off the snap and run sdown ballcarriers with terrific closing speed. Relentless in pursuit and looks to knock the ball loose when he gets to the ballcarrier.

**Weaknesses:** Doesn't seem to give as much effort against the run. Not very effective as a run stopper.

**Bottom line:** The knock on Rice is that he's a one-dimensional pass rusher, but he is solid against the run. After missing eight games in 2006, he needs to stay healthy to remain in the elite class of ends. **Grade: 8.0**

### Greg Spires, E

**Strengths:** Plays smart and understands blocking angles. Does a good job of not letting blockers get into his body. Has a variety of moves and does a good job of setting up blockers.

**Weaknesses:** Doesn't hold up well when runs come straight at him; struggles in short-area battles. Lacks elite physical makeup.

**Bottom line:** Spires is not as gifted physically as most ends, but his instincts, intelligence and aggressiveness make him a good fit in Tampa's one-gap defense. **Grade: 6.9**

### \* Gaines Adams, E

**Strengths:** Has the athleticism, speed and closing burst to chase down plays all over the field. The most explosive pass rusher in the 2007 draft class. Consistently gains the corner with a quick burst. Very polished as a pass rusher, with a variety of moves.

**Weaknesses:** Less effective when teams run right at him. Plays upright and can be engulfed by blockers.

**Bottom line:** Adams is a fantastic athlete who currently is much better against the pass than the run, but that should even out with experience.

### Kevin Carter, T

**Strengths:** Plays his best when on the move. A penetrating tackle who wins with leverage and first-step quickness. Still has a closing burst to the quarterback. Good at avoiding contact and locating the ball.

**Weaknesses:** Not as dominant as he once was. Does not play as big as he should and lacks strength at the point of attack.

**Bottom line:** Carter has the size and pass-rush skills to attack the pocket from anywhere on the line. He still can be a productive veteran. **Grade: 7.0**

### Chris Hovan, T

**Strengths:** An all-out-effort player. Plays with great leverage and comes off the ball low. Has a strong lower body and can hold the point of attack. Has a good short-area burst to ballcarriers. Tough and smart.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to be on the move to be effective against the pass. Lacks length and can be engulfed.

**Bottom line:** Hovan resurrected his career in Tampa and is a very good fit in the Bucs' defense. **Grade: 7.4**

### ↑ Cato June, LB

**Strengths:** Very athletic for a linebacker. Has solid playing speed and range and shows good reaction times and change-of-direction ability. Tough and aggressive; plays with passion.

**Weaknesses:** Has problems in coverage and needs to improve his depth in zone drops. Doesn't do a good job of getting in passing lanes. Often gets engulfed at the line.

**Bottom line:** June is a very good athlete, but he needs to play smarter and tougher. He's a versatile sideline-to-sideline playmaker. **Grade: 7.7**

### ↓ Derrick Brooks, LB

**Strengths:** An elite playmaker who is outstanding in coverage, particularly in man-to-man. Can turn and run with almost any back or tight end. Tackles well in the open field. Has fabulous instincts and football intelligence. Slips blocks well and has great lateral movement and playmaking skills.

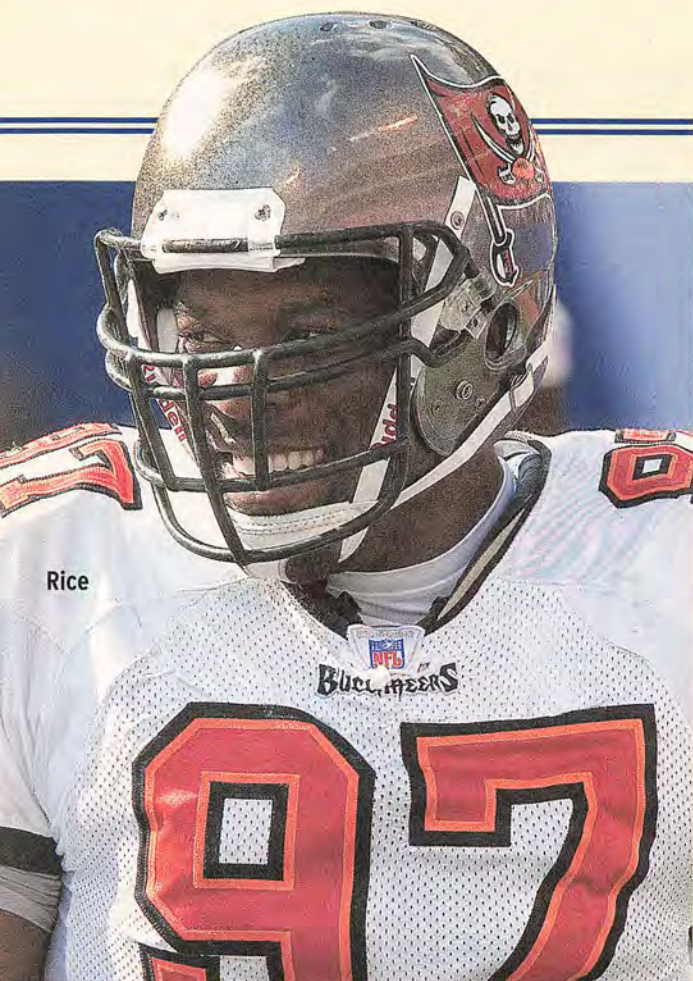
**Weaknesses:** Age has become a factor. Beginning to falter against the run and is not quite as agile.

**Bottom line:** Brooks still ranks in the upper echelon of outside linebackers, but he is on the downside of his career. He probably has one or two good years left. **Grade: 7.4**

### ↑ Barrett Ruud, LB

**Strengths:** Smart with great instincts, strength and toughness. Excels against the run; anticipates well and knows how to use his hands to disengage from blockers.

**Weaknesses:** Has limited athleticism; struggles to make tackles if required to change directions quickly.



Rice

BOB LEVERONE / SN

**Bottom line:** Ruud is a smart, instinctive player who can call the defense and make plays. **Grade: 6.5**

### Ronde Barber, CB

**Strengths:** Has outstanding closing skills and is adept at breaking down plays. Shows terrific change-of-direction skills. Plays his best in zone coverages, particularly cover 2 schemes. An experienced guy who has played at a high level for years. Has good football smarts and instincts.

**Weaknesses:** Not an ideal man-to-man corner and can struggle on an island against vertical receivers. Lacks the speed to recover from mistakes. Aging and has lost a step. Lacks ideal size. **Bottom line:** Barber is still a top playmaker and remains a great fit in Tampa's cover 2 scheme. **Grade: 8.0**

### Brian Kelly, CB

**Strengths:** Has great instincts and range against the run. Very effective in zone coverages and closes well on the ball, particularly on short-to-intermediate routes. Hits hard in the open field and is solid in run support.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks speed and is ineffective in man coverage. Coming off a painful toe injury.

**Bottom line:** Kelly is a great zone defender but can be a liability in man coverage. He's a valuable starter in Tampa's cover 2. **Grade: 7.5**

### ↑ Jermaine Phillips, S

**Strengths:** Has good range and is fluid in zone coverage. Has a good forward burst. Solid at the point of attack and a reliable tackler. Has good strength and explosiveness.

**Weaknesses:** Has bad instincts and reacts late to balls in the air. Takes bad angles and doesn't get good breaks on passes.

**Bottom line:** Phillips is coming off a career year and has established himself as a strong starter. **Grade: 7.3**

### Will Allen, S

**Strengths:** Has good coverage skills and speed. Plays with good range and is adept in man coverage, especially against tight ends.

**Weaknesses:** Needs to get stronger and improve his tackling.

**Bottom line:** Allen was less than stellar in his first full season as a starter. He needs to be a more willing tackler and a more aggressive playmaker. **Grade: 6.5**

## KEY MOVES

### 2007 DRAFT PICKS

Rd.-Pick

GRADE C

#### 1-4 Gaines Adams, DE, Clemson

Arguably the draft's best pass rusher, but can he stop the run?

#### 2-35 Arron Sears, G, Tennessee

Mauls defenders in running game. Footwork an issue in pass protection.

#### 2-64 Sabby Piscitelli, S, Oregon State

Headed for special teams duty until tackling, cover skills improve.

#### 3-68 Quincy Black, LB, New Mexico

May move to safety because of a lack of bulk and strength.

#### 4-106 Tanard Jackson, DB, Syracuse

Good speed and cover skills. Tries too hard to make big hits.

#### 5-141 Greg Peterson, DE, North Carolina Central

Has a high motor. Will be tried at under tackle.

#### 6-182 Adam Hayward, LB/DB, Portland State

Versatile and athletic. Can play safety.

#### 7-214 Chris Denman, OT, Fresno State

Good mobility and technique, limited strength. A backup at best.

#### 7-245 Marcus Hamilton, CB, Virginia

Can be a special teamer immediately. Quick feet, hits well.

#### 7-246 Kenneth Darby, RB, Alabama

Quick. Good in the open field. Needs to be a more patient runner.

## VETERAN PLAYERS

**Additions:** FB B.J. Askew (FA/Jets), DL Kevin Carter (FA/Dolphins), LB Patrick Chukwurah (FA/Denver), CB Sammy Davis (FA/49ers), QB Jeff Garcia (FA/Eagles), LB Cato June (FA/Colts), G Matt Lehr (FA/Falcons), OT Luke Petitgout (FA/Giants), QB Jake Plummer (trade/Broncos), DT Ryan Simms (FA/Chiefs), TE Jeramy Stevens (FA/Seahawks).

**Losses:** CB Juran Bolden (FA), DT Jon Bradley (FA/Lions), OL Cornell Green (FA/Raiders), OL Sean Mahan (FA/Steelers), LB Shelton Quarles (FA), Kenyatta Walker (FA), DE Dewayne White (FA/Lions).

Both appeared tentative and sometimes lost last season. They return as the starters but the addition of draft picks Sabby Piscitelli, Tanard Jackson and Marcus Hamilton means both will need to show marked improvement to keep their jobs. And that seems quite possible under the detail-oriented Morris. Phillips and Allen had trouble with details and fundamentals last season.

Brian Kelly, who missed most of the season with a turf toe injury, returns at left corner. That alone should make it more difficult for teams to throw and run on the Bucs—Kelly is superb in coverage and very active against the run.

Some consider Kelly to be better than right corner Ronde Barber, but Barber remains the quintessential cover 2 corner. He struggles when matched up one-on-one, but he anticipates plays as well as anyone and easily is one of the best blitzing corners in the game. Barber will move inside to cover the slot in the team's nickel package, with Phillip Buchanon likely taking over outside. Buchanon is a playmaker who covers well.

The team also has former Chargers first-rounder Sammy Davis as a backup corner and versatile Calvin Pearson in reserve at safety. **GRADE: B**

## SPECIAL TEAMS

The Bucs have one of the league's best kicking games. Matt Bryant is very steady and showed last year he can make a big kick in crunch time when he nailed a 62-yard game-winner



against the Eagles. Punter Josh Bidwell has one of the NFL's strongest legs. He struggled to pin opponents deep in their territory last season, but he still is an asset for an offense that often needs to be bailed out.

The coverage units are sound, the return units only adequate. The team averaged only 6.5 yards per punt return and 21.4 yards per kick return in 2006, but it has the talent to make improvements. Mark Jones, who has big-play ability but

lacks consistency, will battle Buchanan for the punt return job. Pittman is a powerful straight-ahead runner who can provide decent field position on kickoffs. But he is a stopgap until special teams coach Richard Bisaccia can find a weapon in the role.

**GRADE: C**

## BOTTOM LINE

Having Garcia automatically puts the Bucs in better position than they were to begin last season. If the mostly young offense progresses, the team will be able to score more regularly. The defense is aging rapidly and won't be the dominant force it once was. Look for the Bucs to keep games close, but an 8-8 finish and a wild-card berth are about the best they can hope for.

SN

Roy Cummings covers the Buccaneers for the Tampa Tribune.



## PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
QB	● Jeff Garcia	LE	■ Greg Spires
	● Chris Simms		■ Kevin Carter
FB	● Mike Alstott	DT	■ Kevin Carter
	□ B.J. Askew		□ Ellis Wymys
RB	■ Carnell Williams	NT	■ Chris Hovan
	● Michael Pittman		● Ryan Sims
WR	■ Joey Galloway	RE	▲ Simeon Rice
	□ Paris Warren		■ Gaines Adams
WR	● Michael Clayton	SLB	■ Cato June
	● Maurice Stovall		● Ryan Nece
TE	■ Alex Smith	MLB	● Barrett Ruud
	● Anthony Becht		□ Antoine Cash
LT	■ Luke Pettigout	WLB	▲ Derrick Brooks
	● Anthony Davis		■ Jamie Winborn
LG	● Anthony Davis	LGB	■ Brian Kelly
	□ Arron Sears		● Phillip Buchanan
C	■ John Wade	SS	● Jermaine Phillips
	● Dan Buenning		● Calvin Pearson
RG	■ Davin Joseph	FS	● Will Allen
	□ Jeb Terry		□ Tanard Jackson
RT	● Jeremy Trueblood	RCB	■ Ronde Barber
	□ Chris Denman		□ Marcus Hamilton

## SPECIALISTS

K	■ Matt Bryant	KR	● Michael Pittman
P	▲ Josh Bidwell	PR	■ Mark Jones
		LS	● Andrew Economos

▲ Elite ■ Solid ● Adequate □ Fringe

Depth charts updated weekly at [sportingnews.com](http://sportingnews.com)

## BUCCANEERS ROSTER

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL exp.	College	How acq.	2006 GP/GS
QUARTERBACKS							
7	Jeff Garcia	6-1/200	2/24/70	9	San Jose State	FA/07	8/6
5	Bruce Gradkowski	6-1/217	1/27/83	2	Toledo	D6a/06	13/11
12	Luke McCown	6-3/212	7/12/81	4	Louisiana Tech	T-Cle/05	0/0
16	Jake Plummer	6-2/212	12/19/74	11	Arizona State	T-Den/07	16/11
2	Chris Simms	6-4/220	8/29/80	5	Texas	D3/03	3/3
RUNNING BACKS							
40	Mike Alstott (FB)	6-1/248	12/21/73	12	Purdue	D2/96	16/15
35	B.J. Askew (FB)	6-3/233	8/19/80	5	Michigan	FA/07	13/5
33	Kenneth Darby	5-10/211	12/26/82	R	Alabama	D7c/07	—
28	Lionel Gates	6-0/223	3/13/82	2	Louisville	FA/06	0/0
34	Earnest Graham	5-9/225	1/15/80	4	Florida	FA/04	16/0
32	Michael Pittman	6-0/228	8/14/75	10	Fresno State	FA/02	16/3
24	Cadillac Williams	5-11/217	4/21/82	3	Auburn	D1/05	14/14
RECEIVERS							
88	Anthony Becht (TE)	6-5/272	8/8/77	8	West Virginia	FA/05	16/16
11	David Boston	6-2/228	8/19/78	8	Ohio State	FA/06	0/0
80	Michael Clayton	6-4/215	10/13/82	4	LSU	D1/04	12/9
84	Joey Galloway	5-11/197	11/20/71	13	Ohio State	T-Dal/04	16/14
87	Keith Heinrich (TE)	6-5/250	3/19/79	5	Sam Houston St.	FA/06	0/0
14	Efrem Hill	6-0/179	7/23/83	2	Samford	FA/07	0/0
19	Ike Hilliard	5-11/210	4/5/76	11	Florida	FA/05	16/0
89	Mark Jones	5-9/185	11/3/80	4	Tennessee	FA/05	7/0
17	Chad Owens	5-7/188	4/3/82	2	Hawaii	FA/07	4/0
81	Alex Smith (TE)	6-4/258	5/22/82	3	Stanford	D3a/05	14/7
86	Jerramy Stevens (TE)	6-7/260	11/13/79	6	Washington	FA/07	11/6
85	Maurice Stovall	6-5/216	2/21/85	2	Notre Dame	D3/06	9/2
82	Paris Warren	6-0/213	9/6/82	3	Utah	D7b/05	8/0
45	T.J. Williams (TE)	6-3/258	9/24/82	2	N.C. State	D6b/06	0/0
OFFENSIVE LINEMEN							
72	Dan Buenning (G)	6-4/320	10/26/81	3	Wisconsin	D4/05	10/7
61	Chris Colmer (T)	6-5/306	11/21/80	2	N.C. State	D3b/05	0/0
69	Anthony Davis (T)	6-4/322	3/27/80	4	Virginia Tech	FA/04	16/16
64	Chris Denman (T)	6-7/315	10/7/83	R	Fresno State	D7a/07	—
48	Andrew Economos (LS)	6-1/250	6/24/82	2	Georgia Tech	FA/06	3/0
75	Davin Joseph (G)	6-3/313	11/22/83	2	Oklahoma	D1/06	13/12
73	Matt Lehr (G)	6-2/304	4/25/79	7	Virginia Tech	FA/07	11/11
70	Donald Penn (T)	6-5/305	4/27/83	2	Utah State	FA/06	0/0
79	Luke Pettigout (T)	6-6/310	6/16/76	9	Notre Dame	FA/07	9/9
77	Arron Sears (G)	6-3/319	10/25/84	R	Tennessee	D2a/07	—
77	Jeb Terry (G)	6-5/311	4/10/81	4	North Carolina	D5/04	10/1
65	Jeremy Trueblood (T)	6-8/319	5/10/83	2	Boston College	D2/06	15/13
76	John Wade (C)	6-5/299	1/25/75	10	Marshall	FA/03	16/16
DEFENSIVE LINEMEN							
90	Gaines Adams (E)	6-5/260	6/8/83	R	Clemson	D1/07	—
93	Charles Bennett (E)	6-3/254	4/4/83	2	Clemson	D7b/06	3/0
93	Kevin Carter (E)	6-6/305	9/21/73	13	Florida	FA/07	16/16
71	Jovan Haye (E)	6-2/295	6/21/82	3	Vanderbilt	FA/06	9/0
95	Chris Hovan (T)	6-2/296	5/12/78	8	Boston College	FA/05	16/16
91	Julian Jenkins (E)	6-3/277	10/25/83	2	Stanford	D5/06	12/0
64	Greg Peterson (T)	6-5/271	1/21/84	R	North Carolina Cent.	D5/07	—
97	Simeon Rice (E)	6-5/268	2/24/74	12	Illinois	FA/01	8/8
98	Ryan Sims (T)	6-4/315	5/4/80	6	North Carolina	T-KC/07	16/0
94	Greg Spires (E)	6-1/265	8/12/74	10	Florida State	FA/02	16/16
96	Ellis Wymys (T/E)	6-3/290	4/12/79	7	Mississippi State	D6b/01	13/8
LINEBACKERS							
58	Quincy Black	6-2/227	2/28/84	R	New Mexico	D3/07	—
55	Derrick Brooks	6-0/235	4/18/73	13	Florida State	D1b/95	16/16
52	Antoine Cash	6-1/223	3/5/82	2	Southern Miss	FA/05	16/0
54	Patrick Chukwurah	6-1/250	3/1/79	6	Wyoming	FA/07	14/0
57	Adam Hayward (LB/DB)	6-0/235	6/23/84	R	Portland State	D6/07	—
59	Cato June	6-0/227	11/18/79	5	Michigan	FA/07	16/16
56	Ryan Nece	6-3/224	2/24/79	6	UCLA	FA/02	15/11
51	Barrett Ruud	6-2/241	5/20/83	3	Nebraska	D2/05	16/5
50	Jamie Winborn	5-11/242	5/14/79	7	Vanderbilt	FA/06	14/0
DEFENSIVE BACKS							
26	Will Allen (S)	6-1/200	6/17/82	4	Ohio State	D4/04	16/16
20	Ronde Barber (CB)	5-10/184	4/7/75	11	Virginia	D3b/97	16/16
31	Phillip Buchanan (CB)	5-11/186	9/19/80	6	Miami	FA/06	14/4
27	Torrie Cox (CB)	5-10/181	10/29/80	5	Pittsburgh	D6/03	16/3
22	Sammy Davis (CB)	6-1/195	4/8/80	5	Texas A&M	FA/07	13/1
29	Marcus Hamilton (CB)	5-11/188	2/17/84	R	Virginia	D7b/07	—
36	Tanard Jackson (S)	6-0/200	7/21/85	R	Syracuse	D4/07	—
25	Brian Kelly (CB)	5-11/193	1/14/76	10	USC	D2b/98	2/2
30	Donte Nicholson (S)	6-1/216	12/18/81	3	Oklahoma	D5a/05	1/0
39	Kalvin Pearson (S)	5-10/190	10/22/78	3	Grambling State	FA/04	16/0
23	Jermaine Phillips (S)	6-1/214	3/27/79	6	Georgia	D5/02	16/16
38	Sabby Piscitelli (S)	6-3/225	8/24/83	R	Oregon State	D2b/07	—
29	Alan Zemitis (CB)	6-2/202	8/24/82	2	Penn State	D4/06	0/0
SPECIALISTS							
9	Josh Bidwell (P)	6-3/220	3/13/76	8	Oregon	FA/04	16/0
3	Matt Bryant (K)	5-9/200	5/29/75	6	Baylor	FA/05	16/0

Abbreviations: D1-draft pick, first round; W-claimed on waivers; T-obtained in trade; FA-free-agent acquisition.



# REDSKINS

**As much as the team wants to win now, it's more likely the playoffs are at least a year away**

**SN PICK** 4th, NFC East (5-11)

By PAUL WOODY

**J**oe Gibbs wouldn't admit it nine games into the 2006 season—and he probably still won't admit it—but that's when the Redskins began playing for 2007.

And make no mistake, much has been staked on this season. This is the year Jason Campbell, with a full offseason as the No. 1 quarterback, is supposed to make a huge jump. This is the year running backs Clinton Portis and Ladell Betts have a chance to pound out 1,000 yards apiece.

But for Campbell to take the next step, he needs help. He has to have more receiving options than hitting Santana Moss on quick hitches.

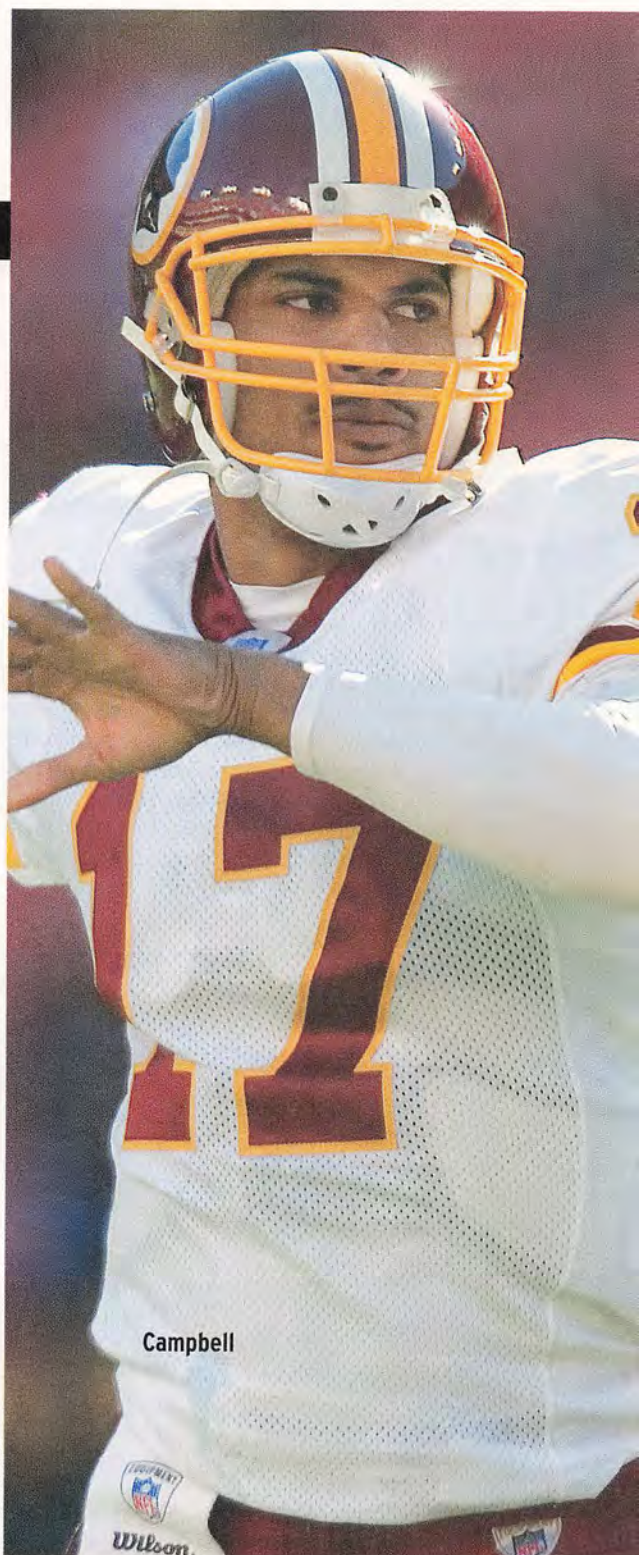
Even if the offense becomes consistently effective, the defense needs to return to its 2004 and '05 form, when it was the strength of the team. For that to happen, right end Andre Carter needs to put together a complete season, tackle Kedric Golston needs to make big strides to take pressure off Cornelius Griffin and pricey free-agent pickup London Fletcher-Baker needs to be the consistent, sure-tackling, every-down middle linebacker the Redskins expect him to be.

Since Gibbs' return, the team has had a bad year, a good year and then another bad year. Gibbs did not come back because he likes roller-coaster rides. If things aren't going well early, don't expect to him to show the patience he displayed last season.

## OFFENSE

Coordinator Al Saunders runs the offense, and "run" is a word Saunders has to remember. His play-calling tilted toward the pass until the final games of '06. This year, the Redskins will run first, throw second. They will be a between-the-tackles, power-running unit. When Campbell does throw, he'll attempt to stretch the field. If he's successful, it would open underneath routes and create more space for the running game.

**Quarterbacks**—Campbell has the arm to get the ball deep, and the team intends to make defenses respect that arm. Campbell, though, must improve his accuracy on all throws. He tended to wait too long for patterns to develop



Campbell

BOB LEVERONE / SN

## SCHEDULE

All times Eastern

Sept. 9	MIAMI	1:00
Sept. 17	at Philadelphia*	8:30
Sept. 23	N.Y. GIANTS	4:15
Sept. 30	Open date	
Oct. 7	DETROIT	1:00
Oct. 14	at Green Bay	1:00
Oct. 21	ARIZONA	1:00
Oct. 28	at New England	4:15
Nov. 4	at N.Y. Jets	1:00
Nov. 11	PHILADELPHIA	1:00
Nov. 18	at Dallas	1:00
Nov. 25	at Tampa Bay	1:00
Dec. 2	BUFFALO	1:00
Dec. 6	CHICAGO†	8:15
Dec. 16	at N.Y. Giants	8:15
Dec. 23	at Minnesota	1:00
Dec. 30	DALLAS	1:00

Strength of schedule: T-18th

\*Monday †Thursday

Analysis of every Redskins game:  
sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom

## REGULAR-SEASON WINS



last season, and he seemed unsure of himself and unfamiliar with his receivers. The hope is experience will bring improvement. Experience also should allow Campbell to handle more of Saunders' playbook.

Mark Brunell has immense experience, maintains a strong work ethic and prepares each week as if he is starting. He doesn't possess a big arm, but he does have enough zip to get the ball where it needs to go on short and intermediate patterns. Brunell is more than capable of taking over for several weeks if Campbell gets hurt.

Rookie sixth-round pick Jordan Palmer will battle veteran Todd Collins for the No. 3 quarterback job. Palmer is bright and has a strong arm, qualities Gibbs values in a young backup.

#### GRADE: C

**Running backs**—Portis and Betts give the Redskins a potent 1-2 punch. Portis is an explosive back, capable of turning every handoff into a game-breaking play. Betts is more of a power back, but he possesses deceptive speed. Portis is a superior blocker who delivers almost vicious blows to blitzing linebackers and pass-rushing ends. Betts has excellent hands and is a better and more reliable receiver than Portis.

Portis is most effective on stretch plays, and the team plans to make them more prominent in the offense. If Portis can get outside the tight end and then make his cut, big things will happen. Assuming Portis remains healthy—he missed half the games last season—he could gain 1,500 yards in fewer carries than he had in 2005.

Rock Cartwright's primary role is on special teams, but he's capable of having a big game when pressed into duty. He is a between-the-tackles runner who has good hands and can be effective in the short passing game.

Fullback Mike Sellers can be a nasty lead blocker. **GRADE: A**

**Receivers**—Lots of money has been invested on wideouts, but the returns have been so-so. Moss is the only reliable commodity. He is dependable, sure-handed, quick off the line and has speed to beat deep zone coverage. He also has an excellent work ethic. The only knock on Moss is lack of durability.

Antwaan Randle El has good speed and is an excellent punt

## SCOUTING REPORTS: OFFENSE

### Jason Campbell, QB

**Strengths:** A solid all-around athlete with great size and a strong arm. Accurate on on short-to-intermediate passes. Has the work ethic needed to improve recognition skills.

**Weaknesses:** More advanced physically than in the mental aspects of the game.

**Bottom line:** Campbell did some good things in his first year as a starter, but he still doesn't play with full confidence. He lacks accuracy on deep throws and doesn't have a complete grasp of the NFL game. **Grade: 6.7**

### Clinton Portis, RB

**Strengths:** Has excellent athleticism, body control and agility. Has exceptional speed and can score from anywhere on the field. Has outstanding vision, burst to the hole and explosiveness through it. Has good balance and the ability to break arm tackles.

**Weaknesses:** Not much of a blocker; dives at the feet of blitzers. Has average hands and is not a crisp route runner. Gets nicked up a lot.

**Bottom line:** Portis' cutback ability makes him a good fit in Washington's zone-blocking scheme. When healthy, he's one of the NFL's top backs. **Grade: 7.9**

### Santana Moss, WR

**Strengths:** Accelerates quickly, makes smooth cuts and consistently separates against man-to-man coverage. Has quick feet and sets up defenders. Has a second gear and can adjust to throws over his outside shoulder. Can catch in stride and fight for jump balls. Has elite elusiveness; always a threat to go the distance.

**Weaknesses:** Undersized and can be pressed effectively and muscled off his routes. Lacks ideal concentration, especially over the middle. Doesn't block with power or sustain.

**Bottom line:** Moss had a down 2006 season, but he still is a dangerous downfield threat. **Grade: 8.0**

### Brandon Lloyd, WR

**Strengths:** Has good quickness and acceleration. Uses his long arms and great leaping ability to win jump balls and make spectacular catches. Has soft hands and can catch balls away from his body. Has good technique getting off press coverage and is adept at finding holes in zones.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks the strength to be a blocker and gets knocked around by physical defensive backs. Doesn't get quality separation on deep routes and occasionally drops easy passes.

**Bottom line:** Lloyd didn't produce in Washington last year the way he had in San Francisco. He has some growing up to do. **Grade: 6.5**

### Antwaan Randle El, WR

**Strengths:** Has good initial burst and is quick in and out of his routes. More quick than fast. Has quick hands and pluck passes out of the air. Very shifty in the open field.

**Weaknesses:** Not strong and can be jammed off the line. Average-to-below route runner who drifts in his patterns. Lacks concentration.

**Bottom line:** Randle El is a punt-return ace who moonlights as a third or fourth wideout for the Redskins. **Grade: 6.2**

### Chris Cooley, TE

**Strengths:** Has good athleticism, sure hands and quickness. Shows body control and change-of-direction skills. Maintains balance and contact to get separation. Has quickness off the ball and runs good routes.

**Weaknesses:** More of an H-back than an in-line tight end. Must have good angles to make blocks and is not strong enough to move the pile.

**Bottom line:** Cooley is a quality receiver and a nice fit in Joe Gibbs' offense. **Grade: 7.7**

### Jon Jansen, T

**Strengths:** Plays with a mean streak and delivers a powerful punch. Gets good pop at the point of attack and excels at drive blocking. Gets the movement needed in the running game and does not lose when locked on. Plays under control and does not get pushed back into the pocket.

**Weaknesses:** Can get beat by speed rushers and struggles to keep them from getting the corner. Not a good downfield blocker and lacks true speed and quickness.

**Bottom line:** Jansen plays hurt and is super tough; he's a throwback who shows up each week no matter what. **Grade: 7.8**

### Chris Samuels, T

**Strengths:** Has good fundamentals, athleticism and upper-body strength.

## FANTASY SOURCE PICKS

#### STUMBLER

WR Brandon Lloyd

#### DRAFT-DAY BARGAIN

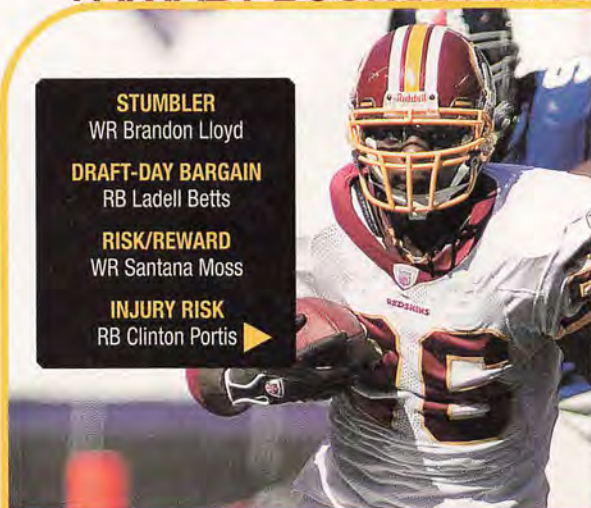
RB Ladell Betts

#### RISK/REWARD

WR Santana Moss

#### INJURY RISK

RB Clinton Portis



JOHN DUNN FOR SN

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Players are graded by War Room scouts on a 1-10 scale.  
*\*Rookies (not graded)*

Uses his long arms effectively in pass protection. Has good downfield blocking skills and football intelligence. Has an explosive first step, gets in good position and does not overextend.

**Weaknesses:** Plays high and gets run over by bull rushers. Loses leverage

tremendous size. Has good strength and pop and is hard to beat when he makes good initial contact. Makes good reads off the ball.

**Weaknesses:** Limited athletically; holds and grabs. Lacks mobility and is too upright on initial contact.



ROBERT SEALE / SN ARCHIVES

easily and lacks lower-body strength. Lacks flexibility.

**Bottom line:** Samuels is a solid starter on the left side who shows flashes of dominance in both the running and passing games. **Grade: 7.8**

#### ↑ Randy Thomas, G

**Strengths:** Has good quickness and punch. Plays with leverage and has the strength to manhandle defenders. Takes good angles and changes directions well. Plays under control; adequate on slide protection and holds his own against bull rushers.

**Weaknesses:** Plays tentatively; makes too many mistakes and appears unsure of himself. Stops moving his feet at contact and does not always use his hands.

**Bottom line:** Thomas' strength and high-effort mentality help him overcome his lack of sound technique. He needs to perform at a more consistent level. **Grade: 7.0**

#### Todd Wade, G

**Strengths:** A mauling run blocker with

lunges and goes down after the snap. Struggles to redirect and recover against double moves.

**Bottom line:** He is a huge blocker who can get the job done. He isn't at his best in a zone-blocking scheme because he lacks athleticism. **Grade: 6.4**

#### ↑ Casey Rabach, C

**Strengths:** Has good size, strength and instincts. Seldom out of position and has great recognition skills on stunts and blitzes. Moves well laterally and can redirect. Has nice initial pop out of his stance. Has improved his footwork and is quick in a short area.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal speed and quickness. Has trouble with quick one-gap players. Doesn't always play with good technique. Doesn't consistently get to the second level, though his effort is good.

**Bottom line:** Rabach is an above-average starter in the Redskins' zone-blocking system. He is a big reason the scheme works. **Grade: 7.1**

**KEY:** ↑ Ascending ↓ Descending

## INSIDERS POLL

Is this the year we see the Joe Gibbs and Redskins of old?



Based on a poll of SN's 32 team correspondents

## BOLD PREDICTIONS

**1** The team will benefit from the two-headed running beast. Look for Clinton Portis and Ladell Betts to both eclipse 1,000 yards. With Betts shouldering much of the load, Portis will stay healthy.

**2** QB Jason Campbell will become comfortable enough with the offense that his completion percentage will jump from 53.1 percent to better than 62 percent.

**3** DE Andre Carter will carry his strong finish in 2006 into '07. He will have the best season of his career and finish with double-digit numbers in sacks.

returner. In his first season with the Redskins, he was only average as a receiver and wasn't able to cause opponents to roll their coverage off Moss.

Third receiver Brandon Lloyd was a major disappointment last season. He is capable of making the circus catch but does not consistently make the routine ones. He needs to run better routes. Journeyman James Thrash, penciled in as the No. 4 receiver, has made only marginal contributions to the offense the past three seasons.

Tight end Chris Cooley was a forgotten man at times in '06, but Saunders now recognizes all of his talents. Cooley is quick off the line, can find the soft spots in zones and has excellent hands. His ability to gain yards after the catch is among the best on the team. Backup Todd Yoder is a solid blocker and decent receiver. Rookie Tyler Ecker could be a blocking tight end in short-yardage situations, if he proves assignment-sure.

**GRADE: C+**

**Line**—With one exception, this is a strong group. There is a hole at left guard because of the departure of free agent Derrick Dockery.

Left tackle Chris Samuels is athletic, durable and intelligent. Right tackle Jon Jansen is just as durable, exudes toughness, is a physical run blocker and a capable pass protector. He also has an excellent hand punch.

Randy Thomas is a model of consistency at right guard. Big, strong and intelligent, he seldom jumps a snap count, gets



caught holding or is pushed off the ball. He uses his long arms to maintain leverage. Center Casey Rabach became more consistent last season. He is strong at the point of attack, effective at making line calls and gets off the snap quickly enough to chip on tackles.

Todd Wade will get first crack at winning the left guard job. If Wade, a veteran tackle, can't make the move inside, Mike Pucillo will get the call. Pucillo gained the confidence of Gibbs last season, but it's unclear whether he's consistent and durable enough to be a full-time starter. Free-agent addition Jason Fabini is another option.

If Pucillo isn't starting, he likely will be a backup guard and center. Providing depth at tackle is Jim Molinaro, who has a good work ethic but needs better footwork; too often, he gets thrown off-balance. **GRADE: B+**

## DEFENSE

Gregg Williams' unit must improve after a season in which there was a big drop-off in tackling efficiency. Williams is an innovator and isn't afraid to try such things as playing man coverage behind a zone blitz, but his players must execute for those strategies to work. Williams runs an aggressive scheme in which he uses lots of blitz packages and line stunts. He does a good job of disguising his tactics.

**Line**—This unit should be better if it is healthier than last season, when left end Phillip Daniels and tackles Griffin and Joe Salave'a all were slowed by injuries. But even if they are healthy, someone must step in and play more effectively next to Griffin. Golston became a starter as a rookie, but to keep that job, he needs to get stronger and be more consistent with his pad level so he doesn't lose leverage.

Carter came on strong at the end of the season, a sign that he finally had a comfort level with the defense. Carter has an excellent burst and a high motor, but he needs to work on a second move when his initial drive off the ball is neutralized. On the left side, Daniels is a solid run stopper and, when healthy, is capable of crashing the pocket and putting pressure on quarterbacks.

Coaches love Salave'a's dedication and drive, but at 32, he might have a hard time carving out a significant spot in the rotation. Backup end Renaldo Wynn's career also is at the

## SECRET WEAPON

### MIKE SELLERS, FB

Sellers is capable of doing many things well. At 6-3, 278, he has a rare combination of size, speed, agility and power. He is an excellent lead blocker, a reliable receiver in the red zone and an effective runner in short-yardage situations. The team needs to make greater use of him to take pressure off its playmakers.



BOB LEVERONE / SN

## SCOUTING REPORTS: DEFENSE

### Andre Carter, E

**Strengths:** Has great quickness and explosiveness. Can get upfield fast. Has pocket awareness; does not allow blockers to ride him past the quarterback. Has good countermoves and works hard with his hands. Uses his long arms to create separation. Plays with leverage. Has good closing speed and is relentless with good instincts. **Weaknesses:** Lacks ideal strength and has a difficult time controlling the line against runs. Struggles with double-teams. Lacks the bulk to stop runs straight at him.

**Bottom line:** Carter has good pass-rushing skills but is only average against the run. **Grade: 7.5**

### Phillip Daniels, E

**Strengths:** Has good size and strength. Plays with a good base and holds his ground at the point of attack. Plays with leverage and is able to disengage from blockers. Will push the pocket by bull rushing. Can play in space; uses club and rip moves. Has a mean streak and plays hard.

**Weaknesses:** Struggles as a pass rusher. Lacks explosiveness and quickness off the edge and burst to the quarterback.

**Bottom line:** Daniels has a great motor. He excels in Washington's pressure defense because he's smart and knows how to set up blockers. **Grade: 7.0**

### ↑ Cornelius Griffin, T

**Strengths:** Has adequate athleticism. Moves well and plays with balance and agility. Has good quickness and an explosive first step. Can control blockers' hands and collapse the pocket. Can be disruptive in the running game as a one-gap penetrator.

**Weaknesses:** Does not play with intensity and tires easily. Gets stuck on line stunts and stops rather than fighting through.

**Bottom line:** Griffin, who has the tools to be a dominant player, is a solid fit in the Redskins' defense. He needs to be more consistent and work to make plays outside the box. **Grade: 7.6**

### ↑ Kedric Golston, T

**Strengths:** Powerful and consistently penetrates the backfield. Excels at shooting gaps with initial quickness and straight-ahead speed. Can overpower blockers at the point of attack. Makes many plays in pursuit and has

upside as a pass rusher.

**Weaknesses:** Not a strong run defender. Lacks good instincts. Sometimes overpursues and gets out of position. Has durability issues.

**Bottom line:** Golston is big, strong and fast and has the skills to be an elite run stopper, but bad technique and poor instincts allow opponents to beat him. He's an up-and-coming youngster who will improve over time. **Grade: 6.7**

### Marcus Washington, LB

**Strengths:** Has athleticism and plays with balance and agility. Has a good motor and makes plays from sideline to sideline. Plays downhill and takes on lead blockers. A speed rusher who can turn the corner.

**Weaknesses:** Plays too high and lacks leverage at times. Has a hard time shedding blockers. Lacks lower-body strength and gets knocked off the ball by lead blockers.

**Bottom line:** Washington has natural playmaking ability and is one of the league's best all-around linebackers. **Grade: 8.0**

### London Fletcher-Baker, LB

**Strengths:** Has great instincts. Reads and reacts quickly and flows to the ball naturally. Excels at avoiding traffic. Uses his hands well, has a good closing burst and shows excellent change-of-direction skills. Has leverage and body control. Also has an elite motor and work ethic.

**Weaknesses:** Undersized and must be protected against the run. Getting older and losing some speed. Lacks cover skills.

**Bottom line:** Fletcher-Baker, even at 32, continues to be one of the best sideline-to-sideline run defenders in the NFL. He is better at blitzing than he is in coverage, and he must be protected against the run. **Grade: 7.6**





### Rocky McIntosh, LB

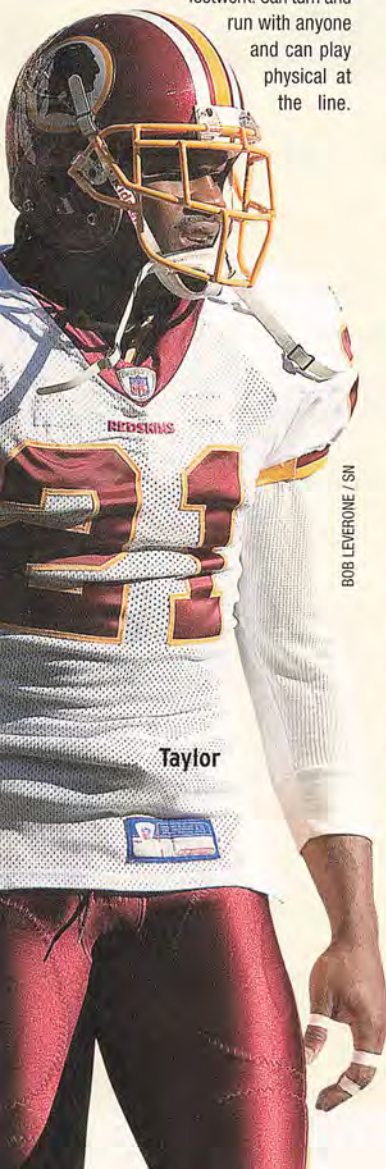
**Strengths:** Has outstanding athleticism and speed. Works best in the open field. Has good range and pursues aggressively. Takes good angles and is an explosive tackler. A good edge pass rusher with a closing burst.

**Weaknesses:** Durability is a concern. Must bulk up to improve leverage.

**Bottom line:** McIntosh is best suited to play on the weak side, where he can use his athleticism and speed in the open field. The Redskins believe he can excel in their system. **Grade: B.9**

### Shawn Springs, CB

**Strengths:** An exceptional athlete with agility and body control. Has good size and quickness. Can mirror any receiver and has good backpedal technique and footwork. Can turn and run with anyone and can play physical at the line.



BOB LEVERONE / SN

Taylor

Makes plays on the ball.

**Weaknesses:** Has slipped in run defense because of durability concerns. Not a willing tackler and allows receivers to get into his body. Loses focus and gets lazy. Must play more disciplined and not rely so much on athleticism.

**Bottom line:** Springs is among the top cover corners in the league. **Grade: B.0**

### Carlos Rogers, CB

**Strengths:** Has exceptional confidence in man coverage. Uses his strength and size to be a force in press coverage; can play on an island. Has tackling ability and the intensity to blitz in attacking schemes.

**Weaknesses:** Must improve recognition skills and awareness. Lacks prototypical speed to erase mistakes.

**Bottom line:** Rogers fought injuries throughout 2006 but flashed elite skills. He could be a future Pro Bowl player. **Grade: 7.6**

### Sean Taylor, S

**Strengths:** An exceptional athlete with good body control. Runs smoothly and displays exceptional range. Has good strength and stays with most receivers. Matches up well against tight ends in man coverage. Plays with urgency and confidence.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks consistency and plays upright. Takes poor angles and is not a sure tackler. Looks confused at times.

**Bottom line:** Taylor plays safety like a linebacker. He's big, strong and physical, but he also can cover a lot of ground in coverage. **Grade: B.2**

### \*LaRon Landry, S

**Strengths:** Excels in all types of coverage. Can lock on tight ends man-to-man, close quickly in zones and make plays along the sideline in deep coverage. Doesn't get fooled by play-action or misdirection. Has smooth, loose hips to change directions and elite speed. Delivers violent hits and is physical with receivers.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks experience. Launches himself at ballcarriers to deliver big hits and misses.

**Bottom line:** Landry has elite physical tools, instincts, toughness and competitiveness. He will make an immediate impact against the run and pass and will be an asset on special teams.

## SCOUT TAKES

### A scout from another team sizes up the Redskins

I think **Jason Campbell** can step it up. He started the last seven games last year and you could see improvement. They have some good personnel on offense, and I think they're going to rely on the running game, with **Clinton Portis** and **Ladell Betts**, and try not to put the game in Campbell's hands as much as possible. ... Adding **London Fletcher-Baker** looks like a stop-gap move, but if they get really good defensive tackle play, he can still be effective. He adds a little more bulk inside than what they had with **Lemar Marshall**. ... Losing **Derrick Dockery** isn't that big. I don't know that they have the answer on their roster, but I think they'll be able to find someone to take that spot. ... It's going to come down to whether their defense plays better than it did last year. They've got to make more big plays and not give up as many big ones.



Betts

JOHN DUNN FOR SN

crossroads. His play last season tailed off and may have been affected by a major arm injury suffered in the 2005 playoffs.

Anthony Montgomery played some at tackle as a rookie last year, but he'll need to make a dramatic improvement to even make the roster.

This group doesn't have to be overpowering, but it does need to run interference for the linebackers. That will happen if Golston or someone steps in as the space-eating, run-stopping tackle next to Griffin. **GRADE: C**

**Linebackers**—Fletcher-Baker was signed to take charge in the middle, but at 32, will he be able to maintain his energetic style of play? He has a history of stabilizing defenses and is an outstanding tackler. He also has been effective in covering the deep middle in the two-deep zone.

Rocky McIntosh gets his chance to be the starter on the weak side. The team likes the pop he provides—and the fact that if he falters, Lemar Marshall will be ready to step in. Marshall lost his middle job to Fletcher-Baker but probably is better off on the outside anyway.

Strongside linebacker Marcus Washington has the highest motor on the team. When he's healthy—he had surgery to correct last year's hip and knee problems—he can do it all. He is a fast, sure tackler who can cover and get to the quarterback when asked to blitz. If either Marshall or McIntosh comes through on the weak side, Washington might get more opportunities to pressure quarterbacks.

Khary Campbell is effective as a short-term relief player in the middle and plays well in goal-line situations. Dallas Sartz and H.B. Blades aren't expected to play much as rookies. But Sartz could be useful in blitzing situations, and Blades has a nose for the ball and could make him a candidate for goal-line and short-yardage duties. **GRADE: C**



**Secondary**—Cornerback Fred Smoot, who played the past two seasons with the Vikings, will compete with Carlos Rogers and provide insurance in case Shawn Springs gets hurt again. But tempering the excitement over Smoot's homecoming is this: He did not distinguish himself in Minnesota.

Rogers suffered a drop-off last season after playing at an elite level as a rookie. Springs is physical and still an excellent cover man, but he's 32 and durability is a major concern.

The team added an experienced corner in David Macklin, who lacks ideal speed and height but is a good tackler and won't get fooled in coverage.

Sean Taylor is as talented as any free safety in the league. He has great range and is capable of delivering devastating blows. But his interest in making those big hits sometimes backfires and leads to big gains. He also tends to bite on play fakes, which leaves the team vulnerable in the deep middle.

LaRon Landry, the team's first-round pick, will stabilize the other safety spot, which was a problem in 2006. Landry gives the secondary another big hitter and frees Taylor to spend more time in run support. If Landry needs more time to develop, look for Pierson Prioleau to step in. Prioleau, who is recovering from a ruptured Achilles' tendon, is not a big hitter, but usually is in the right position to make plays.

Other safeties in the mix are Omar Stoutmire, a free-agent addition who is a sure tackler, and Reed Doughty, a raw but big-hitting second-year player. **GRADE: C+**

## SPECIAL TEAMS

As a punt returner, Randle El can consistently tilt field position in favor of the Redskins. Cartwright has been surprisingly effective as a kickoff returner—he has deceptive speed and can burst through a crease for long returns.

Shaun Suisham has a strong leg for kickoffs and showed he can be consistent on field-goal attempts at the end of last season. Derrick Frost improved his technique, and no longer needs the benefit of a good roll to get a good punt.

Ethan Albright is a consistent long snapper who also is able to get downfield on punts and force return men to

## STADIUM/MEDIA

FedEx Field (91,665, grass)

Tickets: 301-276-6050

Training camp: Redskins Park, Ashburn, Va.; 703-726-7411

Radio: WJFK-FM (106.7)

Website: redskins.com

change directions and run into tacklers.

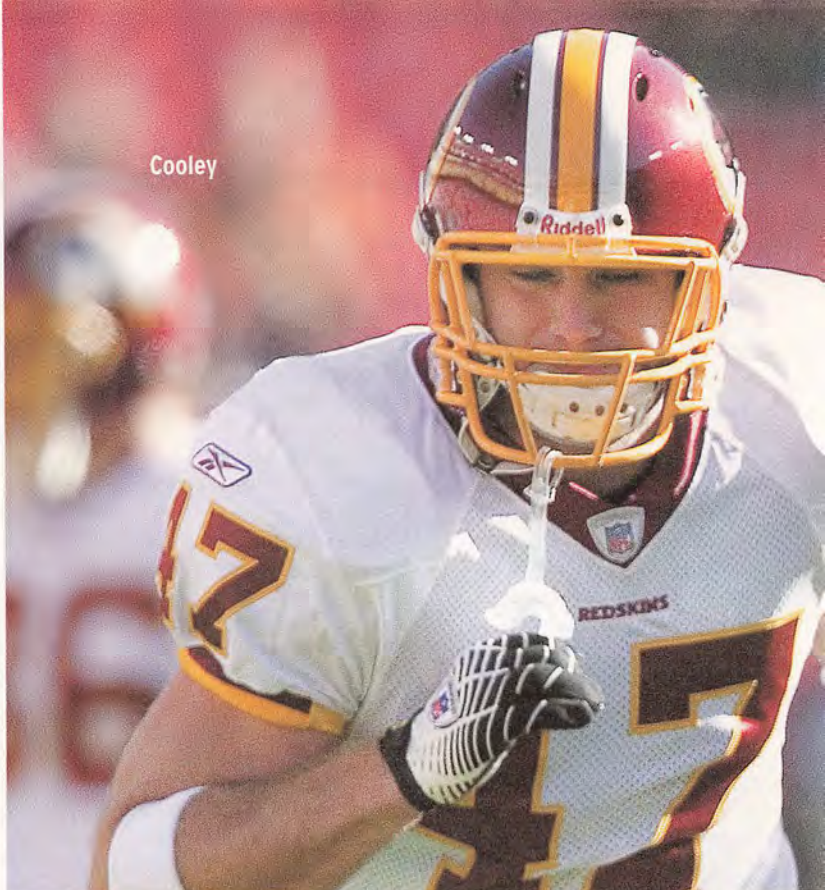
The punt coverage unit, with Thrash as one of the gunners, has become as effective as any part of the team. The kickoff coverage group, however, needs to be more consistent. **GRADE: B**

## BOTTOM LINE

The team addressed specific problems in its free-agent shopping instead of going on another spending spree, but the Redskins still have multiple issues on both sides of the ball. They have talented players, but several of them—Lloyd, Taylor and Rogers—tend to underachieve.

This is not a playoff team, but if things fall right, it could stay in the race for a postseason berth for much of the season. **SN**

*Paul Woody covers the Redskins for the Richmond (Va.) Times-Dispatch.*



Cooley

## KEY MOVES

### 2007 DRAFT PICKS

Rd.-Pick

**GRADE C-**

**1-6 LaRon Landry, S, LSU**

Will be an important piece in the reconstruction of the defense.

**5-143 Dallas Sartz, LB, USC**

A strong tackler in the box. Can drop into coverage.

**6-179 H.B. Blades, LB, Pitt**

A highly productive player and sure tackler. Can take on blockers.

**6-205 Jordan Palmer, QB, UTEP**

Bright and has a very strong arm.

**7-216 Tyler Ecker, TE, Michigan**

Has the potential to be the blocking tight end the team needs.

### VETERAN PLAYERS

**Additions:** OL Jason Fabini (FA/Cowboys), MLB London Fletcher-Baker (FA/Bills), CB David Macklin (FA/Cardinals), CB Fred Smoot (FA/Vikings).

**Losses:** S Adam Archuleta (trade/Bears), OL Derrick Dockery (FA/Bills), WR David Patten (FA/Saints), CB Kenny Wright (FA/Browns).

## PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
QB	● Jason Campbell ● Mark Brunell ■ Mike Sellers □ Todd Yoder	LE	● Phillip Daniels ● Renaldo Wynn
FB	■ Clinton Portis ■ LaDell Betts	DT	● Kedric Golston □ Joe Salave'a
WR	▲ Santana Moss ● Antwaan Randle El	DT	■ Cornelius Griffin □ Anthony Montgomery
WR	● Brandon Lloyd ● James Thrash	RE	● Andre Carter ● Demetric Evans
TE	■ Chris Cooley □ Todd Yoder	SLB	▲ Marcus Washington □ Jeff Posey
LT	■ Chris Samuels □ Jim Molinaro	MLB	■ L. Fletcher-Baker ● Khary Campbell
LG	● Todd Wade ● Mike Pucillo	WLB	● Rocky McIntosh ● Lemar Marshall
C	■ Casey Rabach ● Mike Pucillo	LCB	□ Ade Jimoh ■ LaRon Landry
RG	■ Randy Thomas ● Mike Pucillo	SS	● Pierson Prioleau ● Sean Taylor
RT	■ Jon Jansen ● Todd Wade	FS	● Omar Stoutmire ● Shawn Springs
		RCB	■ Shawn Springs ● Fred Smoot

## SPECIALISTS

K	● Shaun Suisham	KR	● Rock Cartwright
P	■ Derrick Frost	PR	■ Antwaan Randle El
		LS	▲ Ethan Albright

▲ Elite ■ Solid

● Adequate □ Fringe

Depth charts updated weekly at [sportingnews.com](http://sportingnews.com)

Fletcher-Baker

## REDSKINS ROSTER

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL exp.	College	How acq.	2006 GP/GS
QUARTERBACKS							
5	Casey Bramlet	6-4/225	4/2/81	4	Wyoming	FA/06	0/0
8	Mark Brunell	6-1/217	9/17/70	15	Washington	T-Jax/04	10/9
17	Jason Campbell	6-5/227	12/31/81	3	Auburn	D1b/05	7/7
15	Todd Collins	6-4/228	11/5/71	13	Michigan	FA/06	0/0
3	Jordan Palmer	6-5/231	5/30/84	R	UTEP	D6b/07	—
RUNNING BACKS							
46	LaDell Betts	5-10/222	8/27/79	6	Iowa	D2/02	16/9
48	Derrick Blaylock	5-9/210	8/23/79	6	Stephen F. Austin	FA/07	4/2
31	Rock Cartwright	5-7/215	12/3/79	6	Kansas State	D7c/02	16/0
26	Clinton Portis	5-11/205	9/1/81	6	Miami (Fla.)	T-Den/04	8/7
45	Mike Sellers (FB)	6-3/278	7/21/75	8	Walla Walla C.C.	FA/01	16/6
RECEIVERS							
47	Chris Cooley (TE)	6-3/265	7/11/82	4	Utah State	D3/04	16/16
88	Tyler Ecker (TE)	6-6/246	4/18/82	R	Michigan	D7/07	—
84	Eric Edwards (TE)	6-5/257	8/4/80	3	LSU	FA/07	0/0
11	Mike Espy	5-11/195	11/29/82	2	Mississippi	FA/06	1/0
	Zach Linton (TE)	6-8/268	7/2/80	5	North Carolina	FA/07	0/0
85	Brandon Lloyd	6-0/192	7/5/81	5	Illinois	T-SF/06	15/12
89	Santana Moss	5-10/185	6/1/79	7	Miami (Fla.)	T-NYJ/05	14/14
82	Antwaan Randle El	5-10/192	8/17/79	6	Indiana	FA/06	16/16
83	James Thrash	6-0/200	4/28/75	11	Missouri Southern	T-Phi/04	16/0
87	Todd Yoder (TE)	6-4/262	3/18/78	8	Vanderbilt	FA/06	14/0
OFFENSIVE LINEMEN							
71	Ethan Albright (LS/C)	6-5/265	5/1/71	13	North Carolina	FA/01	16/0
75	Calvin Armstrong (T)	6-7/325	3/31/82	2	Washington State	FA/06	0/0
69	Jason Fabini (T)	6-7/304	8/25/74	10	Cincinnati	FA/06	15/0
76	Jon Jansen (T)	6-6/305	1/28/76	9	Michigan	D2/99	15/15
67	Kili Lefotu (G)	6-5/315	11/23/83	2	Arizona	D7a/06	0/0
62	Mike Pucillo (G)	6-4/311	7/14/79	6	Auburn	FA/06	12/0
61	Casey Rabach (C/G)	6-4/301	9/24/77	7	Wisconsin	FA/05	16/16
60	Chris Samuels (T)	6-5/310	7/28/77	8	Alabama	D1b/00	16/16
77	Randy Thomas (G)	6-5/306	1/19/76	9	Mississippi State	FA/03	16/16
68	Ross Tucker (T)	6-4/310	3/2/79	6	Princeton	FA/07	0/0
74	Todd Wade (OL)	6-8/317	10/30/76	8	Mississippi	FA/06	3/1
72	Taylor Whitley (OL)	6-4/305	2/21/80	6	Texas A&M	FA/06	0/0
63	Will Whitticker (G)	6-5/325	8/2/82	3	Michigan State	FA/07	0/0
DEFENSIVE LINEMEN							
79	Lorenzo Alexander (T)	6-1/301	5/31/83	2	California	FA/06	0/0
73	Ryan Boschetti (T)	6-4/300	10/7/81	4	UCLA	FA/04	2/0
99	Andre Carter (E)	6-4/265	5/12/79	7	California	FA/06	16/16
74	Jared Clauss (T)	6-4/290	4/7/81	3	Iowa	FA/07	0/0
93	Phillip Daniels (E)	6-3/288	3/4/73	12	Georgia	FA/04	16/15
92	Demetric Evans (E)	6-3/285	9/3/79	6	Georgia	FA/01	16/0
64	Kedric Golston (T)	6-4/292	5/30/83	2	Georgia	D6b/06	16/12
91	Jamaal Green (E)	6-2/258	6-5/80	3	Miami	FA/06	0/0
96	Cornelius Griffin (T)	6-3/310	12/3/76	8	Alabama	FA/04	14/14
90	Vaka Manupuna (T)	6-0/300	6/30/82	2	Colorado	FA/06	0/0
94	Anthony Montgomery (T)	6-5/305	3/8/84	2	Minnesota	D5/06	5/1
95	Joe Salave'a (T)	6-3/317	3/23/75	9	Arizona	FA/04	13/5
78	Joe Sykes (E)	6-2/266	10/22/82	2	Southern	FA/06	1/0
97	Renaldo Wynn (E)	6-3/292	9/3/74	11	Notre Dame	FA/02	15/1
LINEBACKERS							
54	H.B. Blades	5-10/236	9/30/84	R	Pitt	D6a/07	—
50	Khary Campbell	6-3/232	4/4/79	6	Bowling Green	FA/02	14/1
59	London Fletcher-Baker	5-10/245	5/19/75	9	John Carroll	FA/02	16/16
98	Lemar Marshall	6-2/227	12/17/76	7	Michigan State	FA/01	15/15
52	Rocky McIntosh	6-2/231	11/15/82	2	Miami	D2/06	16/1
55	Dallas Sartz	6-4/235	7/8/83	R	USC	D5/07	—
59	Anthony Trucks	6-1/230	12/1/83	2	Oregon	FA/06	0/0
53	Marcus Washington	6-3/247	10/17/77	8	Auburn	FA/04	14/14
DEFENSIVE BACKS							
37	Reed Doughty (S)	6-1/210	11/4/82	2	Northern Colorado	D6a/06	10/0
34	John Eubanks (CB)	5-10/173	7/13/83	2	Southern Miss	FA/06	1/0
39	Vernon Fox (S)	5-10/200	10/9/79	6	Fresno State	FA/06	16/6
32	Ade Jimoh (CB)	6-1/190	4/18/80	5	Utah State	FA/03	16/0
30	LaRon Landry (S)	6-0/213	10/14/84	R	LSU	D1/07	—
38	David Macklin (CB)	5-10/200	7/14/78	8	Penn State	FA/07	14/7
41	Jerrell Pippens (S)	6-3/200	7/30/80	3	Nebraska	FA/07	0/0
20	Pierson Prioleau (S)	5-11/188	8/6/77	9	Virginia Tech	FA/05	1/0
22	Carlos Rogers (CB)	6-0/196	7/2/81	3	Auburn	D1a/05	15/15
27	Fred Smoot (CB)	5-11/174	4/17/79	7	Mississippi State	FA/07	14/11
24	Shawn Springs (CB)	6-0/204	3/11/75	11	Ohio State	FA/04	9/8
73	Omar Stoutmire (S)	5-11/205	7/9/74	11	Fresno State	FA/07	13/9
21	Sean Taylor (S)	6-2/231	4/1/83	4	Miami (Fla.)	D1/04	16/16
29	Leigh Torrence (CB)	6-0/183	1/4/82	2	Stanford	FA/06	0/0
SPECIALISTS							
4	Derrick Frost (P)	6-4/208	11/25/80	4	Northern Iowa	FA/05	16/0
6	Shaun Suisham (K)	6-0/205	12/29/81	3	Bowling Green	FA/06	8/0

Abbreviations: D1-draft pick, first round; W-claimed on waivers; T-obtained in trade; FA-free-agent acquisition.

# 2008 NFL DRAFT PREVIEW

## It could be another 'year of the quarterback'

### BY WAR ROOM SCOUTS

**T**here is no offseason in regard to NFL draft preparation. Within minutes of the conclusion of the 2007 draft, NFL scouts started preparing for the next one.

We begin the process by focusing on the senior class. Having studied a lot of film of these guys in case they entered the '07 draft as juniors, we have a good handle on the top seniors at each position. Sure, 30-plus juniors and draft-eligible sophomores are likely to declare early, but below is our Super 99 seniors list heading into fall practice. We'll start adding top-notch juniors—such as Arkansas running back Darren McFadden—to the list as we watch more film of them over the summer. You can check the Pro Football War Room at [sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom](http://sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom) for those updates.

The 2007 draft was heavy on defense, but the '08 draft could be all about the quarterbacks. The '08 class already has as many as six first- or second-round senior prospects. Heading our Super 99 list is the same man who topped it last year before he pulled out.

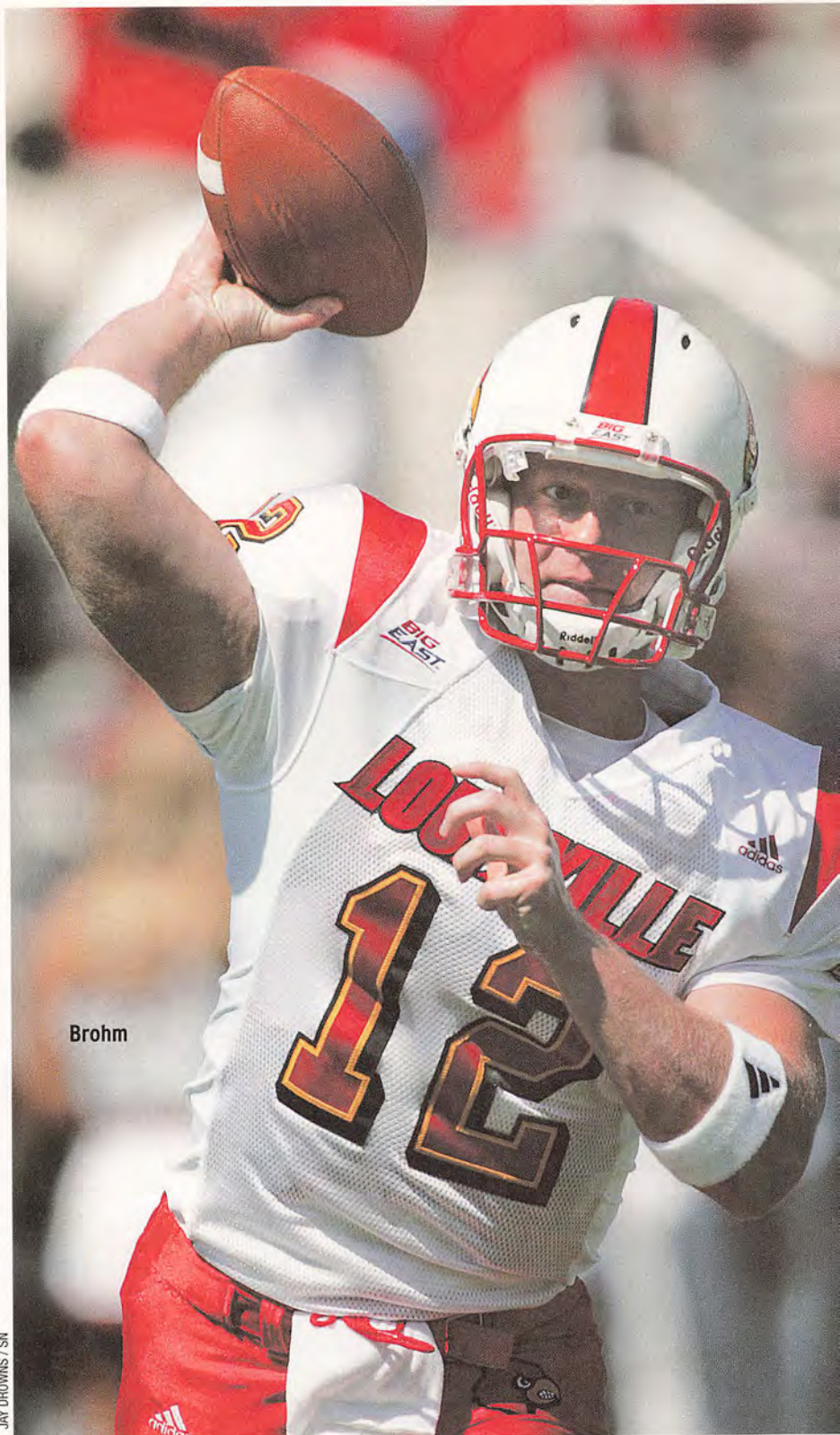
#### 1. Brian Brohm, QB, Louisville (6-4, 226).

Brohm will be an NFL star. He is big and has the arm strength to make every throw with zip and accuracy. He has great footwork and technique and seldom makes a bad decision with the ball. He also shows the athleticism to avoid sacks.

**2. Glenn Dorsey, DT, LSU (6-2, 299).** Dorsey will make an instant impact. He is tough and competitive and consistently disrupts plays. He has the strength to be a force at the point of attack, can shoot gaps to pressure the quarterback and has the speed to chase down ballcarriers from behind.

**3. Frank Okam, DT, Texas (6-5, 320).** Okam is a man-child who had a tremendous sophomore season but was much less consistent in '06. He must play with more intensity, but he has the rare size, athleticism and strength to be a dominant NFL defensive tackle.

**4. Sam Baker, OT, USC (6-5, 305).** Huge but surprisingly athletic, Baker has what it takes to be a top NFL left tackle. He has the long arms and smarts to be consistent in pass protection. As a run blocker, he gets on his man



Brohm

JAY DROWNS / SN

quickly and eliminates him. He is the son of Arena League commissioner David Baker.

**5. Keith Rivers, OLB, USC (6-3, 230).** Rivers makes plays from sideline to sideline. He competes hard on every snap and gets started toward the ball in a flash. He chases down running backs, clogs holes at the point of attack and blitzes effectively. He also is adept in man-to-man and zone coverage.

**6. Tommy Blake, DE, TCU (6-3, 250).** Blake had an incredible '06 season. He shows rare toughness and intensity for a defensive end, enabling him to be a consistently productive pass rusher and to blow up many running plays in the backfield.

**7. Colt Brennan, QB, Hawaii (6-3, 190).** Brennan almost entered the '07 draft and likely would have been the second quarterback drafted (between LSU's JaMarcus Russell and Notre Dame's Brady Quinn). Brennan has the arm strength to make all the throws and is amazingly accurate on short and medium routes.

**8. Early Doucet, WR, LSU (6-0, 207).** Two LSU wide receivers (Dwayne Bowe and Craig Davis) were '07 first-round picks, but Doucet made more highlight-reel plays last season. Doucet has rare size, speed and athleticism and is spectacular after the catch.

**9. Adarius Bowman, WR, Oklahoma State (6-4, 220).** Bowman is a dominant force. He has the hands, size and toughness to catch any pass and make big plays after the catch. To maintain this high draft status, he must prove he has the quickness and burst to separate from NFL defenders.

**10. Andre Woodson, QB, Kentucky (6-5, 230).** Woodson is a top-notch athlete who had a breakout junior season. He has a strong arm and is especially accurate throwing on the move. He avoids sacks and can make something happen when plays break down.

**11. Dan Connor, LB, Penn State (6-3, 233).** Connor is fast and athletic and likely will be a three-down linebacker in the NFL. He plays with energy and passion on every snap, consistently chases down the ball and easily gets a deep drop in zone coverage.

**12. Tony Hills, OT, Texas (6-6, 300).** Hills, a tight end in high school, has the athleticism and long arms to make NFL coaches drool. Hills shows quick footwork but still is developing his technique. He reminds us of Colts rookie second-round pick Tony Ugoh.

**13. Jake Long, OT, Michigan (6-7, 313).** Long plays with a nasty streak that inspires teammates to raise their level of play. He gets in proper position to neutralize explosive pass rushers. Long will be a good NFL player but lacks the elite athleticism to be a franchise building block at left tackle.

**14. Jasper Brinkley, OLB, South Carolina (6-2, 262).** Brinkley, a junior college product entering his second season in Division I, flashes the ability to be highly productive. He has the size and athleticism to be a three-down linebacker in the NFL, but he must become more consistent.

**15. Limas Sweed, WR, Texas (6-5, 219).** Sweed is a huge and productive receiver who has started since the fifth game of his redshirt freshman season. He lacks explosive speed but shows the hands, toughness, athleticism and quickness to make it in the NFL.

**16. Xavier Adibi, LB, Virginia Tech (6-2, 226).** Adibi has the instincts to find the ball quickly and the speed to make plays sideline to sideline. He shows the flexibility to play any of the linebacker positions in the NFL, and he is adept in coverage.

**17. Barry Richardson, OT, Clemson (6-7, 335).** Richardson has been a starter since the fifth game of his true freshman season. He has the size and strength to dominate his man once he locks on. Richardson lacks elite athleticism but has fared well against top competition and should be a solid NFL tackle.

**18. Jameel McClain, DE, Syracuse (6-1, 252).** McClain, a backup linebacker until '06, made a big impact as a junior playing defensive end. He consistently pressures the quarterback with hustle and athleticism. He must improve his technique and use of hands to be as productive in the NFL.

**19. Zackary Bowman, CB, Nebraska (6-2, 195).** Bowman was a premier prospect with elite man-to-man coverage skills before tearing his ACL. After redshirting in 2006, he tore the patellar tendon in his other knee early this year. He faces a long road to recovery, but if he runs well in predraft workouts next spring, he probably will be one of the top corners selected.

**20. Sedrick Ellis, DT, USC (6-1, 285).** Ellis is an undersized but consistently productive and disruptive tackle. He plays bigger than his size and has the athleticism and quicks to make plays outside of his area. He needs a big season to keep himself high in the line rankings.

21. Sam Keller, QB, Nebraska  
22. Quentin Groves, DE, Auburn  
23. Maurice Purify, WR, Nebraska  
24. D.J. Hall, WR, Alabama  
25. Vince Hall, ILB, Virginia Tech  
26. Marcus Griffin, S, Texas  
27. Dwight Lowery, CB, San Jose State  
28. Erik Ainge, QB, Tennessee  
29. John David Booty, QB, USC  
30. Yvenson Bernard, RB, Oregon State  
31. Andre Caldwell, WR, Florida  
32. Sammie Stroughter, WR, Oregon State  
33. Martin Rucker, TE, Missouri  
34. Keenan Burton, WR, Kentucky  
35. Kellen Davis, TE, Michigan State  
36. Gosder Cherilus, OT, Boston College  
37. Chris Ellis, DE, Virginia Tech  
38. Andre Fluellen, DT, Florida State  
39. Lawrence Jackson, DE, USC  
40. Mike Jenkins, CB, South Florida

41. Dennis Keyes, S, UCLA  
42. Chris Long, DE, Virginia  
43. Ken Iwebema, DE, Iowa  
44. Chris Horton, S, UCLA  
45. Chad Henne, QB, Michigan  
46. Matt Ryan, QB, Boston College  
47. Will Arnold, G, LSU  
48. Kirk Barton, OT, Ohio State  
49. Todd Blythe, WR, Iowa State  
50. Antoine Cason, CB, Arizona  
51. John Carlson, TE, Notre Dame  
52. Bruce Davis, DE/OLB, UCLA  
53. Quentin Demps, S, UTEP  
54. Harry Douglas, WR, Louisville  
55. Marcus Monk, WR, Arkansas  
56. Trae Williams, CB, South Florida  
57. Shannon Tevaga, G, UCLA  
58. John Sullivan, C, Notre Dame  
59. Rafael Little, RB, Kentucky  
60. SirVincent Rogers, OT, Houston

61. Keith Brown, WR, Alabama  
62. Fred Davis, TE, USC  
63. Malcolm Jenkins, CB, Ohio State  
64. Justin Forsett, RB, California  
65. Tashard Choice, RB, Georgia Tech  
66. Jonathan Hefney, S, Tennessee  
67. Trevor Laws, DT, Notre Dame  
68. DeMario Pressley, DT, N.C. State  
69. Heath Benedict, OT, Newberry (S.C.)  
College  
70. Darien Williams, S, Oklahoma  
71. SirDarean Adams, OLB, Michigan State  
72. Mike Peterson, TE, NW Missouri State  
73. Mike Hart, RB, Michigan  
74. Malik Jackson, OLB, Louisville  
75. Mark Bradford, WR, Stanford  
76. Alvin Bowen, OLB, Iowa State  
77. Jamar Adams, S, Michigan  
78. Adam Kraus, C, Michigan  
79. Corey McKeon, LB, Nebraska

80. Jonathan Goff, ILB, Vanderbilt  
81. Xavier Omon, RB, NW Missouri State  
82. Ali Highsmith, LB, LSU  
83. Brigham Harwell, DT, UCLA  
84. Jordan Grimes, G, Purdue  
85. Owen Schmitt, FB, West Virginia  
86. Ben Moffitt, LB, South Florida  
87. Blake Powers, TE, Indiana  
88. Simeon Castille, CB, Alabama  
89. Cody Wallace, C, Texas A&M  
90. Amir Pinnix, RB, Minnesota  
91. Ryan Torain, RB, Arizona State  
92. Jason Rivers, WR, Hawaii  
93. J. Leman, LB, Illinois  
94. Chase Ortiz, DE, TCU  
95. Steve Justice, C/G, Wake Forest  
96. Terrence Wheatley, CB, Colorado  
97. Darnell Jenkins, WR, Miami (Fla.)  
98. Matt Robinson, DE, Wake Forest  
99. Allen Patrick, RB, Oklahoma

# SportingNews

THE FIRST NEWSWEEKLY IN SPORTS  
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## 2006 STANDINGS / 2007 PRESEASON SCHEDULE

### AMERICAN FOOTBALL CONFERENCE

East	W	L	T	Pct.	Pts.	Opp.	Home	Away	vs. AFC	vs. NFC	vs. East
New England	12	4	0	.750	385	237	5-3	7-1	8-4	4-0	4-2
N.Y. Jets	10	6	0	.625	316	295	4-4	6-2	7-5	3-1	4-2
Buffalo	7	9	0	.438	300	311	4-4	3-5	5-7	2-2	3-3
Miami	6	10	0	.375	260	283	4-4	2-6	3-9	3-1	1-5

North	W	L	T	Pct.	Pts.	Opp.	Home	Away	vs. AFC	vs. NFC	vs. North
Baltimore	13	3	0	.813	353	201	7-1	6-2	10-2	3-1	5-1
Cincinnati	8	8	0	.500	373	331	4-4	4-4	6-6	2-2	4-2
Pittsburgh	8	8	0	.500	353	315	5-3	3-5	5-7	3-1	3-3
Cleveland	4	12	0	.250	238	356	2-6	2-6	3-9	1-3	0-6

South	W	L	T	Pct.	Pts.	Opp.	Home	Away	vs. AFC	vs. NFC	vs. South
Indianapolis	12	4	0	.750	427	360	8-0	4-4	9-3	3-1	3-3
Tennessee	8	8	0	.500	324	400	4-4	4-4	5-7	3-1	4-2
Jacksonville	8	8	0	.500	371	274	6-2	2-6	5-7	3-1	2-4
Houston	6	10	0	.375	267	366	4-4	2-6	6-6	0-4	3-3

West	W	L	T	Pct.	Pts.	Opp.	Home	Away	vs. AFC	vs. NFC	vs. West
San Diego	14	2	0	.875	492	303	8-0	6-2	10-2	4-0	5-1
Kansas City	9	7	0	.563	331	315	6-2	3-5	5-7	4-0	4-2
Denver	9	7	0	.563	319	305	4-4	5-3	8-4	1-3	3-3
Oakland	2	14	0	.125	168	332	2-6	0-8	1-11	1-3	0-6

### NATIONAL FOOTBALL CONFERENCE

East	W	L	T	Pct.	Pts.	Opp.	Home	Away	vs. NFC	vs. AFC	vs. East
Philadelphia	10	6	0	.625	398	328	5-3	5-3	9-3	1-3	5-1
Dallas	9	7	0	.563	425	350	4-4	5-3	6-6	3-1	2-4
N.Y. Giants	8	8	0	.500	355	362	3-5	5-3	7-5	1-3	4-2
Washington	5	11	0	.313	307	376	3-5	2-6	3-9	2-2	1-5

North	W	L	T	Pct.	Pts.	Opp.	Home	Away	vs. NFC	vs. AFC	vs. North
Chicago	13	3	0	.813	427	255	6-2	7-1	11-1	2-2	5-1
Green Bay	8	8	0	.500	301	366	3-5	5-3	7-5	1-3	5-1
Minnesota	6	10	0	.375	282	327	3-5	3-5	6-6	0-4	2-4
Detroit	3	13	0	.188	305	398	2-6	1-7	2-10	1-3	0-6

South	W	L	T	Pct.	Pts.	Opp.	Home	Away	vs. NFC	vs. AFC	vs. South
New Orleans	10	6	0	.625	413	322	4-4	6-2	9-3	1-3	4-2
Carolina	8	8	0	.500	270	305	4-4	4-4	6-6	2-2	5-1
Atlanta	7	9	0	.438	292	328	3-5	4-4	5-7	2-2	3-3
Tampa Bay	4	12	0	.250	211	353	3-5	1-7	2-10	2-2	0-6

West	W	L	T	Pct.	Pts.	Opp.	Home	Away	vs. NFC	vs. AFC	vs. West
Seattle	9	7	0	.563	335	341	5-3	4-4	7-5	2-2	3-3
St. Louis	8	8	0	.500	367	381	4-4	4-4	6-6	2-2	2-4
San Francisco	7	9	0	.438	298	412	4-4	3-5	5-7	2-2	3-3
Arizona	5	11	0	.313	314	389	3-5	2-6	5-7	0-4	4-2

### PRESEASON (all times Eastern)

#### HALL OF FAME GAME

SUNDAY, AUGUST 5

New Orleans vs. Pittsburgh at Canton, Ohio .....8:00

#### WEEK 1

THURSDAY, AUGUST 9

Cincinnati at Detroit .....7:30

Indianapolis at Dallas .....8:00

FRIDAY, AUGUST 10

Atlanta at New York Jets .....7:00

New England at Tampa Bay .....7:30

Buffalo at New Orleans .....8:00

St. Louis at Minnesota .....8:00

SATURDAY, AUGUST 11

Green Bay at Pittsburgh .....7:30

Jacksonville at Miami .....7:30

Kansas City at Cleveland .....7:30

Carolina at New York Giants .....8:00

Chicago at Houston .....8:00

Washington at Tennessee .....8:00

Arizona at Oakland .....10:00

SUNDAY, AUGUST 12

Seattle at San Diego .....8:00

MONDAY, AUGUST 13

Philadelphia at Baltimore .....7:00

Denver at San Francisco .....8:00

#### WEEK 4

THURSDAY, AUGUST 30

Buffalo at Detroit .....7:00

New York Jets at Philadelphia .....7:00

New York Giants at New England .....7:30

Washington at Jacksonville .....7:30

Cleveland at Chicago .....8:00

#### WEEK 2

THURSDAY, AUGUST 16

Miami at Kansas City .....8:00

FRIDAY, AUGUST 17

Atlanta at Buffalo .....7:00

Carolina at Philadelphia .....7:00

Minnesota at New York Jets .....8:00

Tennessee at New England .....8:00

SATURDAY, AUGUST 18

Houston at Arizona .....4:00

Detroit at Cleveland .....7:00

New Orleans at Cincinnati .....7:30

Tampa Bay at Jacksonville .....7:30

Denver at Dallas .....8:00

Pittsburgh at Washington .....8:00

San Diego at St. Louis .....8:00

Seattle at Green Bay .....8:00

Oakland at San Francisco .....10:00

SUNDAY, AUGUST 19

New York Giants at Baltimore .....8:00

MONDAY, AUGUST 20

Chicago at Indianapolis .....8:00

#### WEEK 3

THURSDAY, AUGUST 23

Jacksonville at Green Bay .....8:00

New Orleans at Kansas City .....8:30

FRIDAY, AUGUST 24

Tennessee at Buffalo .....7:00

New England at Carolina .....8:00

St. Louis at Oakland .....10:00

SATURDAY, AUGUST 25

Detroit at Indianapolis .....7:00

Tampa Bay at Miami .....7:30

Baltimore at Washington .....8:00

Dallas at Houston .....8:00

N.Y. Jets at N.Y. Giants .....8:00

San Francisco at Chicago .....8:00

Cleveland at Denver .....9:00

Minnesota at Seattle .....9:00

San Diego at Arizona .....10:00

SUNDAY, AUGUST 26

Philadelphia at Pittsburgh .....8:00

MONDAY, AUGUST 27

Cincinnati at Atlanta .....8:00

Arizona at Denver .....9:00

Oakland at Seattle .....10:00

San Francisco at San Diego .....10:00

FRIDAY, AUGUST 31

Baltimore at Atlanta .....7:30

Indianapolis at Cincinnati .....7:30

# 2007 SCHEDULE

ALL TIMES EASTERN \*Sunday night games subject to change.

## WEEK 1

### THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 6

New Orleans at Indianapolis.....8:30

### SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 9

Denver at Buffalo.....1:00

Pittsburgh at Cleveland.....1:00

Philadelphia at Green Bay.....1:00

Kansas City at Houston.....1:00

Tennessee at Jacksonville.....1:00

Atlanta at Minnesota.....1:00

New England at NY Jets.....1:00

Carolina at St. Louis.....1:00

Miami at Washington.....1:00

Detroit at Oakland.....4:15

Chicago at San Diego.....4:15

Tampa Bay at Seattle.....4:15

New York Giants at Dallas.....8:15

### MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 10

Baltimore at Cincinnati.....7:00

Arizona at San Francisco.....10:15

## WEEK 5

### SUNDAY, OCTOBER 7

Arizona at St. Louis.....1:00

Atlanta at Tennessee.....1:00

Carolina at New Orleans.....1:00

Cleveland at New England.....1:00

Detroit at Washington.....1:00

Jacksonville at Kansas City.....1:00

Miami at Houston.....1:00

N.Y. Jets at N.Y. Giants.....1:00

Seattle at Pittsburgh.....1:00

Tampa Bay at Indianapolis.....4:05

Baltimore at San Francisco.....4:15

San Diego at Denver.....4:15

Chicago at Green Bay.....8:15

### MONDAY, OCTOBER 8

Dallas at Buffalo.....8:30

Open date: Cincinnati, Minnesota, Oakland, Philadelphia

## WEEK 9

### SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 4

Arizona at Tampa Bay.....1:00

Carolina at Tennessee.....1:00

Cincinnati at Buffalo.....1:00

Denver at Detroit.....1:00

Green Bay at Kansas City.....1:00

Jacksonville at New Orleans.....1:00

San Diego at Minnesota.....1:00

San Francisco at Atlanta.....1:00

Washington at N.Y. Jets.....1:00

Seattle at Cleveland.....4:05

Houston at Oakland.....4:15

New England at Indianapolis.....4:15

Dallas at Philadelphia.....8:15

### MONDAY, NOVEMBER 5

Baltimore at Pittsburgh.....8:30

Open date: Chicago, Miami, NY Giants, St. Louis

## WEEK 13

### THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 29

Green Bay at Dallas.....8:15

### SUNDAY, DECEMBER 2\*

Atlanta at St. Louis.....1:00

Buffalo at Washington.....1:00

Detroit at Minnesota.....1:00

Houston at Tennessee.....1:00

Jacksonville at Indianapolis.....1:00

N.Y. Jets at Miami.....1:00

San Diego at Kansas City.....1:00

Seattle at Philadelphia.....1:00

San Francisco at Carolina.....1:00

Tampa Bay at New Orleans.....1:00

Cleveland at Arizona.....4:05

Denver at Oakland.....4:05

N.Y. Giants at Chicago.....4:15

Cincinnati at Pittsburgh.....8:15

### MONDAY, DECEMBER 3

New England at Baltimore.....8:30

## WEEK 17

### SATURDAY, DECEMBER 29

New England at NY Giants.....8:15

### SUNDAY, DECEMBER 30\*

Buffalo at Philadelphia.....1:00

## WEEK 2

### SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 16

Atlanta at Jacksonville.....1:00

Buffalo at Pittsburgh.....1:00

Cincinnati at Cleveland.....1:00

Green Bay at N.Y. Giants.....1:00

Houston at Carolina.....1:00

Indianapolis at Tennessee.....1:00

New Orleans at Tampa Bay.....1:00

San Francisco at St. Louis.....1:00

Dallas at Miami.....4:05

Minnesota at Detroit.....4:05

Seattle at Arizona.....4:05

Kansas City at Chicago.....4:15

N.Y. Jets at Baltimore.....4:15

Oakland at Denver.....4:15

San Diego at New England.....8:15

### MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 17

Washington at Philadelphia.....8:30

## WEEK 6

### SUNDAY, OCTOBER 14

Cincinnati at Kansas City.....1:00

Houston at Jacksonville.....1:00

Carolina at St. Louis.....1:00

Minnesota at Chicago.....1:00

Philadelphia at N.Y. Jets.....1:00

St. Louis at Baltimore.....1:00

Tennessee at Tampa Bay.....1:00

Washington at Green Bay.....1:00

Carolina at Arizona.....4:05

New England at Dallas.....4:15

Oakland at San Diego.....4:15

New Orleans at Seattle.....8:15

### MONDAY, OCTOBER 15

NY Giants at Atlanta.....8:30

Open date: Buffalo, Denver, Detroit, Indianapolis, Pittsburgh, San Francisco

## WEEK 10

### SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 11

Atlanta at Carolina.....1:00

Buffalo at Miami.....1:00

Cleveland at Pittsburgh.....1:00

Denver at Kansas City.....1:00

Jacksonville at Tennessee.....1:00

Minnesota at Green Bay.....1:00

Philadelphia at Washington.....1:00

St. Louis at New Orleans.....1:00

Cincinnati at Baltimore.....4:05

Chicago at Oakland.....4:15

Dallas at N.Y. Giants.....4:15

Detroit at Arizona.....4:15

Indianapolis at San Diego.....8:15

### MONDAY, NOVEMBER 12

San Francisco at Seattle.....8:30

Open date: Houston, New England, NY Jets, Tampa Bay

## WEEK 14

### THURSDAY, DECEMBER 6

Chicago at Washington.....8:15

### SUNDAY, DECEMBER 9\*

Carolina at Jacksonville.....1:00

Dallas at Detroit.....1:00

Miami at Buffalo.....1:00

N.Y. Giants at Philadelphia.....1:00

Oakland at Green Bay.....1:00

Pittsburgh at New England.....1:00

San Diego at Tennessee.....1:00

St. Louis at Cincinnati.....1:00

Tampa Bay at Houston.....1:00

Arizona at Seattle.....4:05

Minnesota at San Francisco.....4:05

Cleveland at N.Y. Jets.....4:15

Kansas City at Denver.....4:15

Indianapolis at Baltimore.....8:15

### MONDAY, DECEMBER 10

New Orleans at Atlanta.....8:30

Carolina at Tampa Bay.....1:00

Cincinnati at Miami.....1:00

Dallas at Washington.....1:00

Detroit at Green Bay.....1:00

Jacksonville at Houston.....1:00

## WEEK 3

### SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 23

Arizona at Baltimore.....1:00

Buffalo at New England.....1:00

Detroit at Philadelphia.....1:00

Indianapolis at Houston.....1:00

Miami at N.Y. Jets.....1:00

Minnesota at Kansas City.....1:00

San Diego at Green Bay.....1:00

San Francisco at Pittsburgh.....1:00

St. Louis at Tampa Bay.....1:00

Cincinnati at Seattle.....4:05

Cleveland at Oakland.....4:05

Jacksonville at Denver.....4:05

Carolina at Atlanta.....4:15

N.Y. Giants at Washington.....4:15

Dallas at Chicago.....8:15

### MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 24

Tennessee at New Orleans.....8:30

## WEEK 7

### SUNDAY, OCTOBER 21

Arizona at Washington.....1:00

Atlanta at New Orleans.....1:00

Baltimore at Buffalo.....1:00

Minnesota at Dallas.....1:00

New England at Miami.....1:00

San Francisco at N.Y. Giants.....1:00

Tampa Bay at Detroit.....1:00

Tennessee at Houston.....1:00

Kansas City at Oakland.....4:05

N.Y. Jets at Cincinnati.....4:05

Chicago at Philadelphia.....4:15

St. Louis at Seattle.....4:15

Pittsburgh at Denver.....8:15

### MONDAY, OCTOBER 22

Indianapolis at Jacksonville.....8:30

Open date: Carolina, Cleveland, Green Bay, San Diego

## WEEK 11

### SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 18\*

Arizona at Cincinnati.....1:00

Carolina at Green Bay.....1:00

Cleveland at Baltimore.....1:00

Kansas City at Indianapolis.....1:00

Miami at Philadelphia.....1:00

New England at Buffalo.....1:00

New Orleans at Houston.....1:00

Oakland at Minnesota.....1:00

Pittsburgh at N.Y. Jets.....1:00

San Diego at Jacksonville.....1:00

Tampa Bay at Atlanta.....1:00

Washington at Dallas.....1:00

N.Y. Giants at Detroit.....4:15

St. Louis at San Francisco.....4:15

Chicago at Seattle.....8:15

### MONDAY, NOVEMBER 19

Tennessee at Denver.....8:30

## WEEK 15

### THURSDAY, DECEMBER 13

Denver at Houston.....8:15

### SATURDAY, DECEMBER 15

Cincinnati at San Francisco.....8:15

### SUNDAY, DECEMBER 16\*

Arizona at New Orleans.....1:00

Atlanta at Tampa Bay.....1:00

Baltimore at Miami.....1:00

Buffalo at Cleveland.....1:00

Green Bay at St. Louis.....1:00

Jacksonville at Pittsburgh.....1:00

N.Y. Jets at New England.....1:00

Seattle at Carolina.....1:00

Tennessee at Kansas City.....1:00

Indianapolis at Oakland.....4:05

Detroit at San Diego.....4:15

Philadelphia at Dallas.....4:15

Washington at N.Y. Giants.....8:15

### MONDAY, DECEMBER 17

Chicago at Minnesota.....8:30

New Orleans at Chicago.....1:00

Pittsburgh at Baltimore.....1:00

Seattle at Atlanta.....1:00

San Francisco at Cleveland.....1:00

Tennessee at Indianapolis.....1:00

## WEEK 4

### SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 30

Baltimore at Cleveland.....1:00

Chicago at Detroit.....1:00

Green Bay at Minnesota.....1:00

Houston at Atlanta.....1:00

N.Y. Jets at Buffalo.....1:00

Oakland at Miami.....1:00

St. Louis at Dallas.....1:00

Seattle at San Francisco.....4:05

Tampa Bay at Carolina.....4:05

Denver at Indianapolis.....4:15

Kansas City at San Diego.....4:15

Pittsburgh at Arizona.....4:15

Philadelphia at N.Y. Giants.....8:15

### MONDAY, OCTOBER 1

New England at Cincinnati.....8:30

Open date: Jacksonville, New Orleans, Tennessee, Washington

## WEEK 8

### SUNDAY, OCTOBER 28

Cleveland at St. Louis.....1:00

Detroit at Chicago.....1:00

Indianapolis at Carolina.....1:00

N.Y. Giants vs. Miami (London).....1:00

Oak



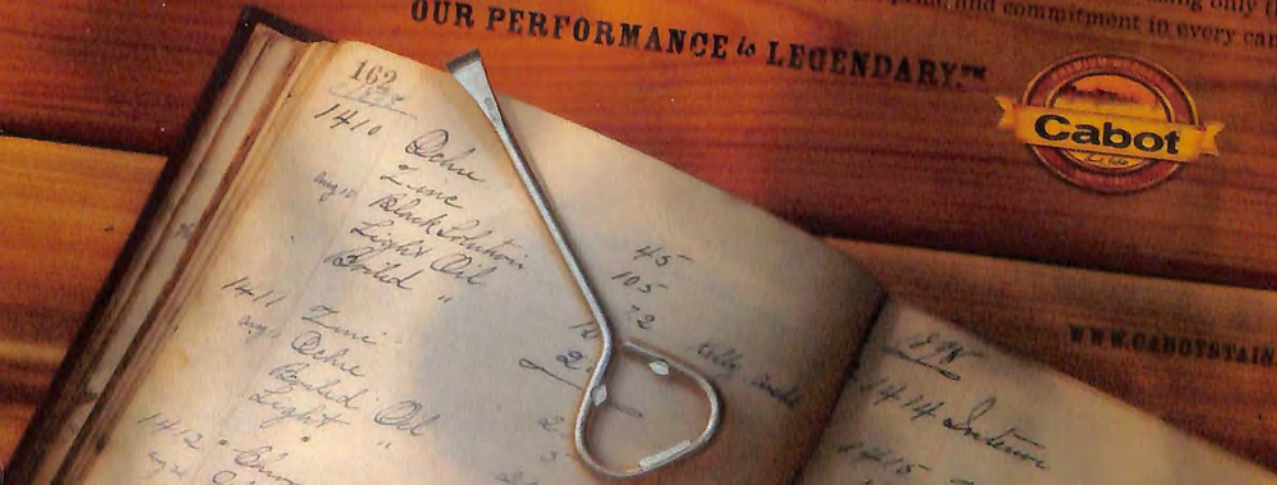


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